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THE POLITICAL CAREER OF IGNATIUS DONNELLY¹

Minnesotans of a generation ago could boast that their state was the home of three men of nation-wide fame — Archbishop Ireland, the forward-looking churchman; James J. Hill, the railway-builder; and Ignatius Donnelly, the apostle of protest. Each was a western type. The prelate may have sacrificed a cardinal's hat to maintain his tolerant views on religion and his aggressive Americanism. The capitalist caught the vision of the west — he saw its boundless possibilities and reached out his hand to grasp them. The reformer brooded over the evils of society, and in his search for a panacea which would end the sorrows of mankind he hopefully accepted the principles of every radical organization that “evolved itself from the prolific protoplasm of the great and growing West.”²

Of the three, Donnelly was the most distinctly western — such an erratic mind could never have been cast in an eastern mold — but he would hardly have been western had not his birthplace been somewhere else. The typical westerner had to come west. Donnelly was born in Philadelphia, on November 3, 1831. His parents were middle-class, well-educated natives of Ireland, who came to this country in 1817 in search of greater opportunity and found it, apparently, for Donnelly's father soon became a successful Philadelphia physician. The free schools of the Quaker city were at that time among the best in the country, and in them the boy Ignatius received what was doubtless the equivalent of a college course. He never forgot his debt to the public school, and repeatedly in his riper years he fought earnestly for the cause of free education. Law was to have been his vocation, and after a period of reading in the

¹ This paper was read in part at a joint session of the American historical association and the Mississippi valley historical association, held in Washington, December 29, 1920.

² Clipping from the *Lincoln Journal*, January 8, 1891, in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 8, in the possession of the Minnesota historical society.

office of Benjamin H. Bristow, later attorney-general of the United States, he began to practice the profession in his native city.³

Donnelly's career as a lawyer was seriously interrupted in 1856 when he made a trip to St. Paul and observed the possibilities of land speculation in the northwest. His marriage⁴ the year before made him all the more willing to abandon the slender income of the struggling young lawyer for the limitless wealth which the west held in store. After careful investigation he located at Nininger, Minnesota, not yet a town, but a popular point down the river from St. Paul for steamboats to land, and the logical site of a good-sized future city. Here he purchased perhaps a thousand acres of land, much of which he immediately sold at a good price to other speculators. A small village appeared with mushroom rapidity, and the successful young speculator spent his newly acquired wealth in the building of a spacious mansion overlooking the Mississippi. Later he loved to tell how in this period of prosperity he walked his porch saying to himself, "Here I am, but twenty-six years old, and I have already acquired a large fortune. What shall I do to occupy myself the rest of my life?" The panic of 1857 eased his mind on this point. Nininger City collapsed. Its houses were moved away, all save Donnelly's, and when the inevitable town did appear it was at Hastings, a point scarcely thought of when Nininger was founded. Handicapped, there-

³ This account follows Dr. Everett W. Fish, *Donnelliana: an appendix to "Cæsar's column."* *Excerpts from the wit, wisdom, poetry and eloquence of Ignatius Donnelly* (Chicago, 1892). The book was prepared while Dr. Fish was a devoted friend of Mr. Donnelly, and is laudatory to the last degree. It was designed for circulation during the campaign of 1892 to offset slanderous statements persistently made against Donnelly by the opposition press. It is not a formal biography, but rather a collection of miscellaneous information about Donnelly, and quotations from his works. Donnelly and Fish soon fell out, and thereafter Donnelly did not entertain a high opinion of the work. "I do not wonder," he wrote to a friend, "that you feel aggrieved at the blunders and misstatements about yourself . . . in *Donnelliana*. I also am aggrieved at them and other things in his book." Donnelly to Gordon, January 10, 1893, in the Gordon papers, in the possession of the Minnesota historical society.

⁴ To Miss Katherine McCaffrey of Philadelphia. Donnelly's home life was ideal. He consulted his wife on all important matters, political and financial, and profited greatly when he took her advice. Her death in June, 1894, was an irreparable loss. They were the parents of three children, two boys and a girl.

fore, by his lands, his house, and his debts, the youthful adventurer began life anew.⁵

Resourcefulness was one of Donnelly's strongest qualities. Years later when he refused to be chastened properly by political defeat a hostile editor likened him to "the fabled giant who gained renewed strength from his mother earth. When stricken down he rose up more powerful than before."⁶ Donnelly had no notion of being finished off by a single blow. His land might not grow cities, but it would grow wheat, so he planted it in wheat. He changed from speculator to farmer, struggled along with his debts as best he could, and learned by experience the trials of the pioneer who goes west to grow up with the country. In 1858 he sought to increase his income by identifying himself temporarily with a St. Paul law firm, but he never gave up his farm.⁷

As an Irishman Donnelly could hardly be expected to remain aloof from politics, especially when the issues were as exciting as they were in the years just preceding 1860. In Pennsylvania he had been a democrat, though he had once turned down a democratic nomination for the legislature partly because he was not in harmony with that party on the slavery question. In Minnesota he came out openly as a republican, and this too when republicanism was still a struggling reform cause. He began his career as a politician by running for the state senate on the republican ticket in 1857, and again in 1858, when his county was regarded as overwhelmingly democratic and his defeat seemed certain. With the odds greatly against him he was in his element, for he ever fought for the love of the fight, and he fought best when the fighting was hardest. Nor did he fail to win converts to "the cause" he represented.⁸

⁵ For further details on the early period of Donnelly's career see Fish, *Donnelliana*, 21-27; William H. C. Folsom, *Fifty years in the northwest* (St. Paul, 1888), 592; Franklin F. Holbrook, "The early political career of Ignatius Donnelly, 1857-1863" (University of Minnesota master's thesis, 1916), 4-9.

⁶ Clipping dated December 31, 1890, in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 8.

⁷ Fish, *Donnelliana*, 27; Hiram F. Stevens, *History of the bench and bar of Minnesota* (Minneapolis, 1904), 2:23; Minnesota historical society scrapbooks, 14:2.

⁸ Fish, *Donnelliana*, 27-29; Marion D. Shutter and J. S. McLain, *Progressive men of Minnesota, biographical sketches and portraits of the leaders in business, politics and the professions; historical and descriptive sketch of the state* (Minneapolis, 1897), 414. Donnelly came within six votes of election in 1858.

The talent for public speaking which Donnelly displayed during this canvass won the attention of the republican state leaders and soon opened for him a real opportunity in politics. By election time, 1859, the republicans had grown sufficiently strong in Minnesota so that they could hope to carry the state. Donnelly's services as a campaigner were not to be ignored, and in spite of his youth—he was then but twenty-eight years of age—he was named for lieutenant governor. The nomination did not come unsought. Donnelly wanted a place on the state ticket, pushed his candidacy before and during the convention with consummate skill, and won against formidable opposition. The naming of a man so young, and so new to Minnesota politics occasioned much surprise and some adverse criticism, but Donnelly's whirlwind campaign introduced him fully to the public and justified the confidence placed in him by the party leaders. The whole republican ticket was triumphantly elected, and two years later was as triumphantly reelected.⁹

As president of the state senate Donnelly let no one despise his youth. He proved to be a parliamentarian of extraordinary skill and a born politician. His influence was exerted especially in favor of relief measures urged by the farmers, who were still suffering, like himself, from the effects of over-speculation, the panic, and hard times.¹⁰

Donnelly liked public office and he easily persuaded himself that he ought to go to congress in 1863 rather than to war. There were other aspirants for the honor from his district, but in political bargaining they were no match for him, and he won easily, if not too honorably. Nomination was equivalent to election, so in 1863, when he was thirty-two years of age, he found himself in Washington, the youngest member of the national house of representatives.¹¹

During his six years in congress—he was twice reelected—the representative from Minnesota occupied himself mainly with the task of securing land grants and other favors for western railroad companies. No doubt he believed this to be the best service he could possibly render to his constituents. "In those great expanses of plain and level country," he argued,

⁹ Holbrook, "Early political career of Donnelly," 25-55.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 84-102; Fish, *Donnelliana*, 55.

“railroads are as important as population. And we should not be guided by any narrow or illiberal spirit in this species of legislation.”¹² Apparently no western railway project was too insignificant or unpromising to obtain Donnelly’s full support. His “services to the railroad companies when in Congress,” declared a Minnesota attorney years later when Donnelly had become the bitter opponent of the railways, “were worth to this State millions of dollars.”¹³

It seems likely that Donnelly was not unaware of the possibility of personal gain which his course opened up. He saw nothing improper about making a fortune for himself and serving his constituents at the same time. Shortly after he left congress he wrote to a friend, Jay Cooke: “I hold \$10,000 of stock of the Lake Superior and Miss. R. R. Co., which was presented to me, without solicitation on my part, by the company, as some slight recognition of very important and valuable services rendered by me to the Company.”¹⁴ Nor was he altogether blind to the value of railway support in a political way. “I need not say to you,” he wrote Cooke in the fall of 1870, when he was again a candidate for congress, “that I am a friend to the Northern Pacific Railway Company. I drew most of the original bill under which it took its first land grant . . . and on all subsequent occasions I have labored earnestly and I think efficiently in behalf of the Company. If I am returned to Congress I shall go there as the firm friend and advocate of the Northern Pacific R. R. Co.”¹⁵ The railways, however, repaid Donnelly but badly for all his help to them. Whatever visions of wealth they may have dangled before his eyes they allowed to fade rapidly away, and they even lent support to his political enemies. His subsequent hostility to the railroads was doubtless due in no small part to these early disappointments and to the distrust they engendered.

For the most part Donnelly’s congressional career differed little from that of any other western republican. He was not

¹² *Congressional globe*, 39 congress, 2 session, 3464. See also *ibid.*, 38 congress, 1 session, 2036.

¹³ *St. Paul Press*, February 6, 1874.

¹⁴ Donnelly to Cooke, February 15, 1870, in the Donnelly papers, in the possession of the Minnesota historical society.

¹⁵ Donnelly to Cooke, September 28, 1870, Donnelly papers.

the only one to work energetically for railway land grants to western roads and on the all-important question of the war and reconstruction he stood rigidly with the majority of his party.¹⁶ Indeed, much of the crusading ardor, later so strikingly manifest in everything he did, seems to have been satisfied by the struggle to subdue slavery and to make abolition permanent and effective. Yet there is some striking evidence of his independence of thought. He favored with floods of oratory the establishment of a bureau of immigration,¹⁷ and he was mainly responsible for the creation of a bureau of education.¹⁸ His most unusual proposition was that the government should devise some system for the planting of woods and forests on public lands, and he believed that the agitation which he began for this measure led to the passage years later of the timber culture act.¹⁹

Before the end of his second term in congress Donnelly began to have trouble with the leaders of his party in Minnesota. Certain of them were not at all pleased when he discovered and denounced in a sensational letter to Thaddeus Stevens an obvious attempt to defraud the government by excessive appropriations for the maintenance of Indian agencies in the northwest.²⁰ Moreover, they feared that Donnelly aspired to a seat in the United States senate, and to win this he must displace Alexander Ramsey, republican "boss" of the state. It was decided that for the good of the party Donnelly's political career ought to be brought to an end. In 1866 he had a hard fight for his renomination; in 1868, he lost.²¹

¹⁶ Characteristic utterances on this subject may be found in the *Congressional globe*, 39 congress, 2 session, 559-561, 1323.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38 congress, 1 session, 857-858.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 39 congress, 1 session, 2967-2968; 40 congress, 2 session, 1139-1140; James G. Blaine, *Twenty years in congress; from Lincoln to Garfield. With a review of the events which led to the political revolution of 1860* (Norwich, Connecticut, 1886), 2:167-168.

¹⁹ *Congressional globe*, 39 congress, 1 session, 2674; Folsom, *Fifty years in the northwest*, 592; *St. Paul Dispatch*, March 9, 1870.

²⁰ Fish, *Donnelliana*, 47-49.

²¹ An account of the contest for the nomination in 1866 is given by Donnelly himself in a letter to H. L. Gordon, January 20, 1893, in the Gordon papers. See also Harlan P. Hall, *Observations; being more or less a history of political contests in Minnesota from 1849 to 1904* (St. Paul, 1904), 76-90; *A history of the republican party from its organization to the present time to which is added a political*

Donnelly might have won his fourth nomination in spite of the organized opposition to him had he not been guilty of a grave indiscretion during the session of congress immediately preceding the election. One of Donnelly's numerous land-grant bills was blocked by Elihu B. Washburne of Illinois, whose sympathy for the policy of wholesale distribution of public lands to prospective railways was slight. Donnelly, in a letter to one of his constituents, quite properly, it seems, blamed Washburne for this failure and also said that it was Washburne's ambition to see his brother, W. D. Washburn of Minnesota, in Donnelly's seat in the house. This letter was published and Washburne replied to it in a most scurrilous denunciation of Donnelly, which the *St. Paul Press* gave to its readers. Washburne declared that the whole congressional record of Donnelly was "covered with venality, with corruption, and with crime," and that he had "proved false alike to his friends, his constituents, his religion, and his God."²² This was more than Donnelly could stand, and on a question of personal privilege he took the floor to defend himself before the members of the house. Washburne was not popular in congress—he was commonly known as "the watch-dog of the treasury"—and so Donnelly addressed a sympathetic audience. Not only did he attempt to refute the charges made against him but, to use his own picturesque language, he "carried the war into Africa," and so "burned and blistered" Washburne that even the "balm of Grant's patronage could not cover the scars."²³ In the blistering process, however, Donnelly used language which even in its expurgated state makes most extraordinary reading and of which he had no occasion to be proud. Members of the house were delighted with the discomfiture of Washburne, but they thought less of Donnelly afterwards and the incident was used to discredit him in the campaign which followed.²⁴

history of Minnesota from a republican point of view and biographical sketches of leading Minnesota republicans, published by Eugene V. Smalley (St. Paul, 1896), 182-186; Paul S. Smith, "Party politics in Minnesota, 1865-1871" (University of Minnesota master's thesis, 1918), 50-56.

²² *Congressional globe*, 40 congress, 2 session, 2354.

²³ The *Anti-Monopolist* (St. Paul), September 20, 1877; Hall, *Observations*, 77.

²⁴ The episode is recorded in full in the *Congressional globe*, 40 congress, 2 session, 2349-2356. See also Fish, *Donnelliana*, 73-78; Smith, "Party politics in Minnesota," 48.

Donnelly's career as a successful politician now drew rapidly to a close. There was a three-cornered fight in his district in 1868 with the regular republican nominee, the regular democratic nominee, and Donnelly as the contestants. Donnelly's claim that he was the real choice of the republicans of the district was somewhat borne out by the fact that he polled more votes than did the other republican. But the split in the party ranks resulted in a democratic victory—a price which the republican chiefs were probably willing to pay to be rid of a political nuisance. Donnelly's friends, however, were so numerous that to placate them there was some disposition to give him the republican nomination for governor. This did not materialize, however, nor did Donnelly's best-laid plans to succeed Ramsey in the United States senate avail.²⁵

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of these reverses in shaping the course which Donnelly was thenceforth to follow. But for them he might have remained an ordinary and inconspicuous politician. Because of them he was tempted to break entirely away from the old party organization and to assume that thoroughly independent attitude which he ever after maintained. It is probable that Donnelly's motive, to begin with, did not lie much deeper than his feeling of personal pique, his desire to revenge himself upon the republican leaders, and his determination to get back to congress at all costs. The transformation in his character was not accomplished in a moment; there were several years of transition. But these things in no way contradict the fact that prior to the defeats of 1868 and 1869 the reformer spirit within him had been deeply buried beneath the demands of party regularity, whereas after those eventful years it was uncovered and given the chance it needed to grow.

It required just such a shock as this to open Donnelly's eyes to the fact that the old political era was ending and a new one with new problems, new issues, and perhaps new parties was beginning. What, he asked himself, was to be the great political contest of the future? The more he thought of it the more certain he was that he knew. He had watched, it may be with envious eyes, the accumulations of vast wealth which characterized the war and reconstruction period. None knew better than he

²⁵ Hall, *Observations*, 76-93; Smalley, *History of the republican party*, 185-186; Smith, "Party politics in Minnesota," 50-64.

the growing power of the possessors of that wealth and the way in which they made of the government a servant and a tool for their business interests. He saw how insignificant in point of fact was the power of the people, how great was their ignorance of the plight into which they had fallen, how much they needed a courageous leader. The great struggle of the future, he concluded, would be between those who had and those who had not; between the advocates of the rights of property on the one side and the advocates of the rights of men on the other side; "between the few who seek to grasp all power and wealth, and the many who seek to preserve their rights as American citizens and freemen."²⁶ Rejected and reviled by the few, he aspired to become the political Moses of the many.

It was as a reformer and a defender of downtrodden humanity, Donnelly reflected, that he had joined the republican party years before. But with the passage of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments to the constitution the republican program on the slavery question would be complete. What was to be the attitude of the party toward the issues of the new era? Would it again champion the cause of the weak and oppressed, or would it become the party of privilege and vested rights? Donnelly feared greatly for its future. He thought that he discerned on the part of the eastern creditor aristocracy a determination to take complete control of the party machinery and through it to rule the country. Already the debtor west exerted but little influence in the party councils. "It is for the people of the United States to determine," he said, "whether the republican party shall 'renew its youth like the eagle' and shall be the party of liberality, justice and popular right, or whether, forgetting its glorious record in behalf of freedom and humanity, it shall become the base instrument of cliques and rings, of aristocracies and monopolies, of capital against labor, of the few against the many."²⁷

²⁶ A later utterance, but in the same vein as his contemporary speeches. Quoted from a Donnelly circular letter dated August 20, 1886, in the Castle papers, in the possession of the Minnesota historical society.

²⁷ From a speech delivered in St. Paul on August 20, 1870, in Donnelly scrap-books, 1:127. See also statements in the *Anti-Monopolist*, April 1, 1875. Certainly Donnelly hoped for a time for reform within the party. "Meant to reform the party not to destroy it," he indorsed one letter. Roath to Donnelly, December 8, 1869, Donnelly papers. A few days later he wrote: "The Republican party is made up of good,

As for Donnelly, he would champion the party of the many, whatever its name might be. He believed that poverty was unnecessary and wrong, and that any party or group of men whose actions forced poverty or distress on others ought to be overthrown. "The first right of man," he maintained, "is to have everything essential to his happiness. Whatever stands in the way of this is not law but fraud and robbery. 'The earth is man's and the fullness thereof.' Wherever amid the fullness of the earth a human stomach goes empty, or a human brain remains darkened in ignorance, there is wrong and crime and fraud somewhere." ²⁸

Donnelly chose to open his battle for popular rights with a complete change of front on the tariff. In congress he had been regarded as a protectionist and in 1866 he had defended protectionist doctrines before a Minnesota audience with his accustomed skill.²⁹ But at Farmington, Minnesota, on October 13, 1869, he resolutely turned his back on his earlier record and came out squarely in favor of tariff reform.³⁰ This change of opinion came after a careful study of the subject and represented a genuine conversion. In one of his scrapbooks may be found numerous clippings, statistical tables, and outlines, which, coupled with his own notations, show the steady progress of his mind toward low tariff doctrines.³¹ During the next few years he wrote and spoke constantly on the tariff. Farmers and laborers alike listened with ready ears to his argument that the eastern manufacturers were protected by the tariff in demanding unjustifiable prices for their goods; and the farmers were especially interested to learn that the low price of wheat was due also to the high tariff, which virtually denied admission to foreign manufactured products in return for American grain.³² In 1870, honest, intelligent, thoughtful men who . . . will insist that its principles be got right, especially upon new issues on which it has not yet taken sides." Donnelly to Dodge, December 10, 1869, Donnelly papers.

²⁸ Letter to the *St. Paul Dispatch*, March 30, 1870.

²⁹ *St. Paul Pioneer*, November 4, 1866; Fish, *Donnelliana*, 60; Smith, "Party politics in Minnesota," 26.

³⁰ Reported in the *St. Paul Press*, October 14, 1869. See also his subsequent letters from Washington to the *St. Paul Dispatch*, February 23, March 1, 14, 1870.

³¹ Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 1. See also an interesting letter to the *Chicago Tribune*, dated December 3, 1869, in the Donnelly papers.

³² *Speech on the tariff delivered at Ingersoll hall, St. Paul, August 20, 1870*, a pamphlet in Donnelly scrapbooks, 1:128. See also the *St. Paul Dispatch*, August

standing upon his tariff record, Donnelly became the people's independent candidate for congress. He was indorsed by the democrats, and he might have won had not his republican opponent proclaimed fully as advanced views on the tariff as did Donnelly himself. He "elbowed me off my own platform," Donnelly complained later.³³

Probably Donnelly had hopes even at this early time of starting a new reform party. In his acceptance of the nomination in 1870 he urged upon the farmers the necessity of united action. "The great interest of Agriculture," he declared, "is almost voiceless in the nation. It is tongue-tied by parties, and gagged by tricksters. Let it organize itself. If it can achieve success, all lesser interests can cling to it and be carried forward with it to prosperity. If it perishes, the nation sinks."³⁴ He attempted to arouse interest in such a movement by urging antimonopoly state conventions, evidently to make ready a program for the state election in 1871, but several efforts in this direction failed to enlist sufficient support to warrant the undertaking.³⁵ Despairing of success along independent lines, Donnelly finally accepted a republican proposition that he return to the party ranks and write his political views into the platform of 1871.³⁶ He seemed discouraged even to the point of giving up the rôle of reformer and for a time he took up public lecturing on non-political subjects. His ready wit and fluent tongue won hearty

25, 1870. Donnelly's friends were not a unit in indorsing his new stand. "The tariff whirlwind which you have raised," wrote one of them, "you will not be permitted to ride into power. Its only personal effect upon you is, that whereas before you had the warmest, most determined cohort of personal friends, now they are scattered and divided as their principles and feelings on the question may control them." Foster to Donnelly, August 16, 1870, Donnelly papers.

³³ Hall, *Observations*, 160-163. A copy of the petition asking Donnelly to run independently is in the Donnelly papers, September 12, 1870. The republican platform of the second district nominating convention together with the nominee's speech of acceptance is in Donnelly scrapbooks, 1: 155. For the quotation see *ibid.*, 4:78.

³⁴ *St. Paul Pioneer*, September 14, 1870.

³⁵ The *Anti-Monopolist*, October 22, 1874, reviews these efforts. See also Smalley, *History of the republican party*, 190; *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1870, p. 510; *St. Paul Pioneer*, November 30, 1870.

³⁶ Donnelly's return to the republican party was announced in a letter to the *St. Paul Pioneer*, September 5, 1871. He explained the incident in detail later in a speech reported in the *Daily Globe* (St. Paul), October 24, 1878.

approval for him throughout the state and his engaging personality increased the number of his friends.³⁷

Donnelly's retirements from politics never lasted long. The campaign of 1872 brought him once more into the arena. He always insisted that he could have had the regular republican nomination from his district for congress that year had he been willing to remain aloof from the liberal movement. His enemies said that he turned liberal only when he foresaw that the republicans would not name him. However that may be, he came out openly for Greeley before the district nominating convention met and announced that he was a candidate for no office.³⁸ The old republican party, he believed, must submit to immediate and drastic reform, or "must give way to a new party, nameless perhaps as yet, which shall be emphatically the Party of the People; which shall embody the best principles of Washington and Jefferson, and embrace the best element of all the present parties."³⁹

Donnelly speedily made himself at home in the liberal republican camp. He had already signified his belief that reconstruction had gone too far. "The true cure for the Ku Klux," he contended, "is the school-house." And again, "We have our Ireland in the south."⁴⁰ He also embraced the cause of civil service reform, adhering to the novel proposition that permanent tenure of office alone was the all-important necessity, and that it mattered little how appointments were made, or whether or not the appointee to begin with had any especial fitness for his post.⁴¹ To Donnelly the great shortcoming of the liberal repub-

³⁷ "Six years in Washington," and "American humorists," were the titles most frequently announced. Numerous comments on these lectures may be found in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 4.

³⁸ A letter from Donnelly explaining his stand is printed in the *St. Paul Dispatch*, July 15, 1872. See also the *Hastings Gazette*, August 3, 1872, and the *Anti-Monopolist*, February 5, 1875.

³⁹ *St. Paul Dispatch*, July 15, 1872.

⁴⁰ Speech at Red Wing, Minnesota, July 4, 1872, found in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 4; *St. Paul Dispatch*, August 19, 1872.

⁴¹ *St. Paul Press*, June 27, 1872. Donnelly's final stand on civil service reform differed rather markedly from this. In 1897 he wrote: "Civil service is a contrivance gotten up by the 'ins' to keep the 'outs' out forever. . . . We need an upturning and a brooming out of the cobwebs." *Representative*, March 17, 1897.

lican party was that it had nominated an ardent protectionist for president; but he took what comfort he could from the platform statement which favored "such a policy on the Tariff as the popular will shall dictate."⁴²

A better field for his activities was furnished by the granger movement. Hard times following the panic of 1873 accompanied by a grasshopper plague in the southwestern part of the state made Minnesota a fruitful field for the political agitator. The farmers were convinced that something was wrong and turned blindly upon the railroads as the most likely cause of their distress.⁴³ Donnelly at once became the unsurpassed advocate of granger ideas. Here was a real issue between the masses and the classes, and in such a case he now knew where he stood. As the chief lecturer of the Minnesota granges he presented his views to assemblies in nearly every county in the state, and finally he published them in a pamphlet entitled *Facts for the granges*, which was scattered broadcast. The regulation of railway rates, coöperative buying, cheap water transportation, the restoration of specie payments, and direct taxation in the place of the protective tariff were the remedies he proposed.⁴⁴

But how was such a program to be enacted into law? Donnelly had little faith in the original granger idea of working through the older parties. "We can't look for a remedy in the Republican party," he said. "Its brains and its pocketbook are in New England." Nor did he think the democratic party appreciably better, since "its brains and its pocketbook" were in the south.⁴⁵ Why not create a new party—a farmer's party—which would represent the wishes of the western agriculturist? The building up of a nonpolitical organization, he told the grangers, was only "to make a gun that will do everything but shoot."⁴⁶

Donnelly's advice was heeded. Local conventions inspired

⁴² *St. Paul Dispatch*, July 15, 1872; July 28, 1873.

⁴³ Smalley, *History of the republican party*, 194-195; Solon J. Buck, *The granger movement; a study of agricultural organization and its political, economic and social manifestations, 1870-1880* (*Harvard historical studies*, volume 19 — Cambridge, 1913), 159-166.

⁴⁴ Ignatius Donnelly, *Facts for the granges* (St. Paul, 1873), 10-17. A copy of this pamphlet is in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 5.

⁴⁵ Donnelly scrapbooks, 5:4.

⁴⁶ *Facts for the granges*, 18.

by his oratory began to call for the formation of a new party to consist of farmers and laborers,⁴⁷ and in September, 1873, as a result of this agitation more than a hundred delegates met at Owatonna, Minnesota, and organized what they called the people's antimonopoly party. Donnelly was the temporary chairman of the new party convention, sounded the keynote, and took a leading part, though not always the decisive part, in its proceedings. A full state ticket was nominated which the liberal republicans and democrats were induced to accept.⁴⁸ The republican convention, meanwhile, thoroughly frightened by the activities of the grangers, turned down the machine candidate for governor and nominated in his place Cushman K. Davis, a man whose speaking and writing in behalf of the farmers had attracted about as much attention as the work of Donnelly himself. Even so, the discontent among the farmers was so great that Davis won by the slender margin of five thousand votes, and the republican candidate for state treasurer was defeated. In the lower house of the legislature the republicans elected only 53 members out of 104, and many of the majority were as thoroughly granger and antimonopolist in their sympathies as were their adversaries.⁴⁹

Donnelly figured in this campaign as the successful candidate from his county for the state senate. Some charged that he made the race merely to be available for promotion to the United States senate should his party in the legislature be strong enough to elect a senator. He did, indeed, receive the votes of the fusion forces for that office, and his whole life long he openly aspired to hold a seat in the upper house of congress, but no doubt he valued his place in the state legislature.⁵⁰ Certainly he made the most of his opportunity to in-

⁴⁷ *St. Paul Press*, June 5, 6, July 29, 1873.

⁴⁸ *St. Paul Press*, September 3, 1873; *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1873, pp. 510-511; Solon J. Buck, "Independent parties in the western states, 1873-1876," in *Turner essays in American history* (New York, 1910), 149-152. The full text of the platform is in Donnelly scrapbooks, 2:15.

⁴⁹ *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1873, p. 512; Smalley, *History of the republican party*, 195-197.

⁵⁰ Donnelly remained a member of the state senate for five consecutive years, being twice reëlected. Fish, *Donnelliana*, 83. The contest for the United States senatorship is described in Hall, *Observations*, 145-146. Donnelly gives his version of it in the *Anti-Monopolist*, February 5, 1875.

troduce and push legislation. "Omitting his daily minor follies," the *St. Paul Press* counted no less than fifteen prominent reform measures that he fathered during the session of 1874. Practically all of his bills failed to become law. Some of them were dropped because they were utterly unreasonable, as, for example, a bill requiring all insurance companies doing business in the state to invest their premiums at seven per cent in the same counties in which they had been received. Others, such as his proposition to fix the maximum freight rate on grain at one cent per ton per mile, were of doubtful expediency.⁵¹ Still others represented his hobbies, and made him a laughingstock. Had he been able to convince the legislature of its desirability, "a bill to plant trees as wind-breaks along certain roads" would have been passed, and the normal schools of the state would have been abolished. Donnelly's attitude was even more objectionable than his measures. He assumed an air of superiority over friends and enemies alike; he talked entirely too much; and he made merciless use of his skill at witticisms, sarcasm, and invective to annihilate all those who opposed him.⁵²

Donnelly's impractical turn of mind unfitted him for the serious business of legislation, but as an agitator he was ever superb. He found a new field for this talent when in the summer of 1874 he began the publication of a weekly journal of reform called the *Anti-Monopolist*. "Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward," was the motto that appeared above the headlines on each issue, and it was indeed an unusual number which failed to present some newly inspired message of reform. Through the journal Donnelly waged unceasing warfare against what he later learned to call "plutocracy," and all those who defended it. To his mind the struggle of the ages was on. Could the ordinary man retain his economic independence, or must he become the wage slave of the possessor of great wealth? "Lib-

⁵¹ Donnelly was so anxious to obtain legislation unfavorable to the railways that he was even credited with the desire to bankrupt them, since such a course would at least get rid of the watered capital on which they were trying to pay interest. *St. Paul Press*, May 16, 1874. When a regulative law finally passed the legislature, it was not drastic enough to suit him and Donnelly and the man in the senate most favorable to the railways cast the only votes against it. *St. Paul Press*, March 6, 1874.

⁵² *St. Paul Press*, March 13, May 6, 7, 1874; *Anti-Monopolist*, March 11, 1875.

erty," he believed, must either "overcome all her foes or perish forever from the earth." Every man "must bear a share in the great battle." And Donnelly wished it to be understood that he, for one, had "enlisted for life."⁵³

In spite of the active propaganda carried on by Donnelly's paper, the antimonopolist party had not long to live. In the elections of 1874 and 1875 the semblance of an organization was maintained, but too close fraternization with the democratic and liberal republican forces tended to rob the new party of its separate identity. All three factions, democrats, liberal republicans, and antimonopolists, were grouped together in those years as the party of the "opposition," but the difference between "opposition" conventions and democratic conventions whether in personnel or in principles, grew steadily less.⁵⁴

Donnelly viewed this situation with much distress. He had no objection to the use of democratic votes to further the cause of reform, but he did object to being swallowed bodily by an unregenerated democracy. Moreover, he could not but observe that public interest in reforms had flagged. The granges, upon whose support the antimonopolists relied, had lost much of their original vitality, for the granger movement had not succeeded in alleviating hard times.⁵⁵ There was just one ray of hope. In many of the western states, and to a considerable extent in Minnesota, the inflation idea was taking hold. A reform party which should make paper money its cardinal principle stood some chance of success. But Donnelly, unfortunately, had never embraced the greenback heresy, and in his granger speeches had even demanded the resumption of specie payments as one of the essential reforms.⁵⁶ As late as the spring of 1875 he had objected strenuously in the columns of the *Anti-Monop-*

⁵³ *Anti-Monopolist*, July 16, 1874.

⁵⁴ The history of the antimonopolist organization is reviewed by Donnelly in the *Anti-Monopolist*, July 12, 1875, September 21, 1876.

⁵⁵ Solon J. Buck, *The agrarian crusade. A chronicle of the farmer in politics* (*Chronicles of America*, volume 45 — New Haven, 1920), chapter 5.

⁵⁶ *Anti-Monopolist*, April 22, 1875. "We must oppose all inflations of the currency," he argued in 1870, "which serve only to keep up an unnatural state of things, raise prices, increase the cost of living, and benefit nobody but speculators and gold brokers. For these principles, for one, I am ready to enlist as a high private and fight in the rear rank." Letter to the *St. Paul Dispatch*, March 2, 1870. His hard money stand is also stated in his pamphlet, *Facts for the granges*, 10, 15, quoted in part in Buck, *The agrarian crusade*, 81.

olist to "an unlimited manufacture of money," and had contended that the currency "must, in any event, rest upon a gold basis."

Apparently Donnelly decided to give up his own views on the currency in order to be in harmony with the majority of reformers throughout the country and thus to help along the greater "cause" of the people against the aristocracy of wealth. He began to confess confusion on the money question and likened its intricacies to those of Schleswig-Holstein. He discovered that "gold never has been and never will be the exclusive currency of the nation." He saw unexpected evils in contraction, in the national banks, and in a set time for resumption.⁵⁷ At length he could boldly advocate: (1) that there should be an abundant currency, fully equal to the necessities of business, and increasing with the increase of commerce and production; (2) that this currency should be issued by the nation itself without the intervention of any third parties; (3) that it should be full legal tender for all debts, public and private, including duties on imports.⁵⁸ In short, Donnelly not only flirted with greenbackism; he wooed and won it. Nor was his conversion the less sincere because he so earnestly desired it to come to pass. An accepted point of view was ever a challenge to his dialectic skill, and he longed to disprove it, even to himself. Moreover, the most ardent supporters of "hard money" were the very men of wealth whom it was his mission in life to oppose. How could he stand on their platform and fight the battle of the masses?

In the spring of 1876 Donnelly resurrected enough of the old antimonopoly state committee to call a convention at Owatonna, Minnesota, for the purpose of determining whether or not the state should be represented in the great greenback gathering already called for Indianapolis. The Owatonna convention was a Donnelly affair. After indorsing his views on the currency, the tariff, and civil service reform, it obediently selected him

⁵⁷ *Anti-Monopolist*, May 20, June 17, November 25, 1875, March 2, April 27, 1876.

⁵⁸ *Anti-Monopolist*, September 13, 1877. In the *Daily Globe*, October 24, 1878, Donnelly admitted that he had changed his mind twice, once on the tariff, and once on the money question. "He thought it to his honor that he had been able to study and think on these questions and [having] found that he had been in error had had the manliness to come out and avow it."

to be the chief spokesman of Minnesota at Indianapolis, nominated him to head a complete ticket for independent presidential electors, and adjourned.⁵⁹

At Indianapolis Donnelly acquitted himself with credit. Widely known and a skillful orator, he was the natural choice of the convention for temporary chairman. His keynote speech showed that he had in mind something more than the creation of a party of one principle. What he desired was a party composed primarily of the working classes; a party which would advocate every reform that would better their condition; a "party in whose judgment and in whose heart the poorest man who toils in the mines of Pennsylvania or in the mills of New England will outweigh in consequence and importance Jay Gould or Cornelius Vanderbilt. . . . This is a people's country," he contended, "and we need a people's party. I much mistake the signs of the times if we have not formed it here to-day."⁶⁰

The results of the first campaign in Minnesota of the independent or, as it was more commonly called, the greenback party, could hardly have been gratifying to its leaders. There was no state election in 1876, but Donnelly determined to run for congress, hoping through democratic support to wrest his district from the republican column. In their state convention, however, the democrats came out definitely in favor of Tilden and hard money, and in Donnelly's district they insisted on putting up a candidate of their own. Donnelly, nevertheless, made the race. Although he ran third in the district his personal popularity was so great that he received more votes for congressman than were cast in the entire state for Cooper and Cary, the Indianapolis nominees.⁶¹

Before the campaign of the following year opened, the greenback propaganda had begun to have its effect. Greenback clubs, patterned after the now almost extinct granges, were organized all over the state.⁶² The circulation of the *Anti-Monopolist*

⁵⁹ *Anti-Monopolist*, February 10, March 16, April 6, 1876; Frederick E. Haynes, *Third party movements since the civil war, with special reference to Iowa; a study in social politics* (Iowa City, 1916), 112; Smalley, *History of the republican party*, 201.

⁶⁰ *Anti-Monopolist*, May 25, 1876. The platform adopted is given in *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1876, p. 781.

⁶¹ *Anti-Monopolist*, June 8, November 2, 11, December 21, 1876; *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1876, p. 557; Smalley, *History of the republican party*, 202.

⁶² Mention of these clubs is made in the *Anti-Monopolist*, January 27, March 2,

was pushed assiduously. Donnelly expounded the greenback doctrines to large audiences in his own inimitable way. And when the time was ripe a greenback convention nominated a state ticket headed by an ex-republican of "soft-money" proclivities. As Donnelly and his friends had hoped and expected, this ticket was indorsed by the democrats, whose leaders saw in fusion with the greenbackers their only chance of success. But formidable opposition only stimulated the republicans to redouble their energies, and when the votes were counted the greenback nominees were found to have been defeated by a majority of about fifteen thousand—less, Donnelly consoled himself, than the majority by which Hayes won the state from Tilden the year before.⁶³

The year 1878 was the high-water mark for the greenback movement. With the resumption of specie payment fast approaching, greenbacks steadily rose in value and prices declined. For the farmers of the northwest times apparently grew harder every year.⁶⁴ A special grievance with which they must contend was the control which the milling and elevator companies exercised over the purchase price of wheat. It was confidently asserted that a "miller's ring" existed, which not only depressed to the minimum the price paid for grain, but also found means to cheat the farmer in the "grading" of his wheat. A two-quart measure was the standard container used by buyers for this purpose, and the farmers contended that "by filling the kettle rapidly, by the stroke, and by the manipulation of the scale beam, an adept could make a difference of one or two grades in a load of wheat."⁶⁵

When the republicans of the third Minnesota district named for congress William D. Washburn, a prominent miller and the brother of Elihu B. Washburne, whom Donnelly had so mightily assailed in the national house many years before, it was not difficult to predict who his opponent would be. There was an insistent demand that Donnelly enter the field against Washburn, and frequently thereafter. In the issue of March 21, 1878, a formula is given for the use of those who desire to start such organizations.

⁶³ *Anti-Monopolist*, September 13, October 4, November 15, 1877, January 17, 1878; Smalley, *History of the republican party*, 203.

⁶⁴ Buck, *The agrarian crusade*, chapter 6.

⁶⁵ Hall, *Observations*, 228; *Daily Globe*, October 18, 24, 1878.

burn, a demand which the former had little inclination to resist. He was normally a resident of the second congressional district rather than of the third, but an unsuccessful attempt at large-scale farming which he and his sons had carried on at Donnelly, Minnesota, in the western part of the state, gave him a technical residence in Washburn's district. Three times that year Donnelly was nominated by third district conventions: once by a council of workingmen of the city of St. Paul, once by the greenbackers, and once by the democrats.⁶⁶

Donnelly was officially a greenbacker and he advocated soft money persistently, but the "swindling brass kettle," and the activities of the "wheat ring" were the chief subjects of his anti-Washburn orations. He had little difficulty in securing a strong following among the farmers, who rolled up a handsome majority for him on election day in all the rural counties of the district. But in Minneapolis, Washburn's home city, the miller's majority was great enough to overcome Donnelly's lead in the country. The final vote gave Washburn 21,036 to 18,024 for Donnelly.⁶⁷

From the very day of the election Donnelly believed that his defeat was due to bribery and corruption, and the evidence which he was able to collect in proof of his contention still sounds convincing.⁶⁸ He determined to contest Washburn's seat before the bar of the house, and in December, 1879, he appeared in Washington for that purpose. His cause was a good one, and the committee before which he plead had a majority friendly to him. Donnelly fully expected to win the contest. "The chairman, Mr. Springer, is earnestly my friend," he wrote to his wife, "so is the chairman of the sub-committee."⁶⁹ In fact, the dem-

⁶⁶ *Anti-Monopolist*, September 12, 1878; Fish, *Donnelliana*, 93-96; Hall, *Observations*, 225-230.

⁶⁷ *Anti-Monopolist*, November 14, 1878; *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1878, p. 567; Fish, *Donnelliana*, 97. In the second Minnesota district a greenback-democrat named Poehler won over his republican opponent, but subsequent greenback successes in Minnesota were slight. In 1879 Donnelly presided over a convention which named a full state ticket, but in the election which followed it failed to receive democratic support and attracted only a negligible number of votes. *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1879, pp. 629-632. The semblance of an organization was maintained until after the presidential election of 1884.

⁶⁸ *Daily Globe*, November 9, 1878; *Anti-Monopolist*, November 28, 1878; *House miscellaneous documents*, 46 congress, 1 session, volume 1, no. 9.

⁶⁹ Donnelly to Mrs. Donnelly, December 20, 1879, Donnelly papers.

ocrats would have been only too glad to bolster up their slender majority in the house by seating a member who could be counted on to coöperate with them. From the republican minority Donnelly could expect only "a bitter fight . . . because they will understand that my admission will give the democrats a majority of the Congressional delegations in twenty-one states, and if the election of president goes into the House, as is highly probable, a democratic president would be elected."⁷⁰

As usual Donnelly's hopes proved vain. The contest dragged on interminably. The subcommittee having in charge the investigation of the case favored the unseating of Washburn, and so reported.⁷¹ But just as this was about to be recommended by the whole committee an anonymous letter was unearthed in which a proposal was made to Chairman Springer that he should vote for Washburn for a five thousand dollar consideration. There was a strong suspicion that Donnelly, or more likely one of his lieutenants, knew more about the letter than was admitted. Donnelly ever afterwards ridiculed the idea that he or any of his friends would want to bribe Springer to vote for Washburn, but the suspicion settled into belief that Donnelly's chief counsel had taken this dishonorable means to show Springer that Washburn was really capable of offering a bribe. The result was that Washburn held his seat, although congress salved Donnelly's feelings slightly by voting him an unusually large sum in compensation for his expenditures in bringing the contest.⁷²

This failure drove Donnelly into one of the longest of his periodic retirements from politics. His paper went under and his debts increased. In fact, before his books began to bring him a fair income Donnelly could always prove by his impecunious state that he could not have been purchased or bribed in the way that his enemies repeatedly charged. "The same degree of energy exerted in behalf of the plunderers of the people," he declared in 1877, "would have given us half a million."⁷³

⁷⁰ Donnelly to his mother, January 9, 1880, Donnelly papers; *Daily Globe*, March 10, 1880.

⁷¹ The *Daily Globe*, March 19, 1880, prints the full report of the subcommittee. See also *ibid.*, March 25, 28, April 2, 1880.

⁷² *Daily Globe*, April 4, 1880; *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul), April 2, 1880; Hall, *Observations*, 215-220; Fish, *Donnelliana*, 97.

⁷³ *Anti-Monopolist*, February 15, 1877; compare *ibid.*, February 12, 1875.

Donnelly now resolved upon a literary career. In 1881 the first of his books, *Atlantis: the antediluvian world*, a production in every way typical of the man, made its appearance. Donnelly loved theories, and having stumbled upon a good one he seldom rested until he had proved it to his own satisfaction. For such a purpose he had an almost limitless fund of information to draw upon. He possessed one of those peculiarly retentive memories that enabled him to recall at will practically everything of consequence that he had ever heard or read, and he read everything that he could get his hands upon. His private library became the wonder and admiration of the whole northwest. It contained books on every subject, and infinite numbers of pamphlets which he bound carefully together for future reference. He saved everything—newspaper clippings about himself or about subjects in which he was interested, the multitudinous letters which he received from his friends, and occasionally also copies of letters which he himself wrote. Armed with this heterogeneous collection of information, Donnelly essayed to prove in his first book the truth of Plato's theory that "there once existed in the Atlantic Ocean opposite the Mediterranean Sea, a large island" where original civilization developed, and from which it spread to the adjoining continents. The island, which Plato called Atlantis, eventually sank into the sea, destroying the race which inhabited it. Only a few escaped in ships to Europe or America, there to spread the "tidings of the appalling catastrophe, which has survived to our own time in the Flood and deluge legends."⁷⁴

The success of *Atlantis* was immediate and great. Numerous editions were printed in both England and America, and the book was even translated into foreign languages. Antiquarians looked upon Donnelly's work as a mere intellectual sport, but the author really believed his arguments and convinced such men as William E. Gladstone of their truth.⁷⁵ Encouraged by the outcome of his first venture, Donnelly startled scientific circles by the publication in 1883 of a book called *Ragnarok: the age of fire and gravel*, in which he attributed the deposits of clay, gravel, and silt found upon the face of the earth to

⁷⁴ Ignatius Donnelly, *Atlantis: the antediluvian world* (New York, 1882), 1-2.

⁷⁵ *Minnesota historical collections*, 13: 341; *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1901, p. 421; *American antiquarian*, 5: 204-205.

contact in some bygone age with a mighty comet.⁷⁶ Donnelly's entirely un-Minnesotan way of producing books the very titles of which passed comprehension earned for him a vast reputation among his Minnesota friends. They called him the "Sage of Nininger," and believed implicitly in his scholarship even when they refused him political advancement.

Donnelly's reputation as a man of great learning was enhanced in some circles and damaged in others by his publication in 1888 of a two-volume work entitled *The great cryptogram*, in which he attempted to prove that Bacon wrote the works commonly attributed to Shakespeare.⁷⁷ He had stumbled upon this theory years before, and had been attracted to it as he was always attracted to anything novel or absurd. In so far as the book stated the usual argument that Shakespeare was not a sufficiently well-informed man to write the plays and that Bacon was, no particular objection could be raised. But Donnelly rested his final proof upon a complex and ingenious cipher, which was immediately rejected by the literary world and was afterwards applied with equal success to *Don Quixote*.⁷⁸ Donnelly never gave up his theory, however, and one of his latest works, *The cipher in the plays and on the tombstone*, attempted to correct the mistakes of his earlier Shakespearean venture and to apply the cipher to the curious inscription on the tombstone of Shakespeare.⁷⁹ He lectured repeatedly on this subject, although usually to very select audiences. Let Donnelly be announced to speak on "Wit and humor" or "Topics of the day," and he would be greeted by capacity houses; but when he spoke on the

⁷⁶ Ignatius Donnelly, *Ragnarok: the age of fire and gravel* (New York, 1883), 91-97. Reviewed in the *Dial*, 3:207.

⁷⁷ Ignatius Donnelly, *The great cryptogram: Francis Bacon's cipher in the so-called Shakespeare plays* (Chicago, 1888). Donnelly presents some of his arguments in the *North American review*, 144:572-582; 145:46-68; 148:307-318. A reply is printed in the same journal, 145:555-562.

⁷⁸ *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1901, p. 421. An interesting account of the origin of Donnelly's Shakespearean studies is given in an article in the *Kansas City World*, June 7, 1896. See also numerous clippings in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 9. J. Gilpin Pyle, *The little cryptogram: a literal application to the play of Hamlet, of the cipher system of Mr. Ignatius Donnelly* (St. Paul, 1888), is a caustic criticism of Donnelly's work. He is defended by William D. O'Connor, in *Mr. Donnelly's reviewers* (Chicago, 1889).

⁷⁹ Ignatius Donnelly, *The cipher in the plays and on the tombstone* (Minneapolis, 1899). See also comments in the *Representative*, March 29, November 9, 1899.

Baconian theory the masses were not interested. On numerous occasions he debated the question with Professor Freeman, a Shakespearean scholar connected with the University of Wisconsin. While Donnelly was probably a better debater, Freeman's arguments usually proved more convincing to those who knew enough about the subject to be entitled to an opinion.⁸⁰

Donnelly's literary labors not only won for him considerable recognition the world over, but they also provided him with an assured, though moderate, income, something he had never known before. In 1888 he paid a visit to England, where he was well received and even accorded the rare honor of lecturing before both Oxford and Cambridge universities.⁸¹

His trip abroad opened a vast new storehouse of information for him to theorize upon. It is interesting to note that he seemed to foresee with approval the end of the American policy of diplomatic isolation. "We should throw the gigantic moral influence of this great republic," he said, "into the scale in favor of every effort of the people of Europe to improve their condition and strike down their tyrants. The cowardly policy of non-interference, which might have been wise in the days of our youthful imbecility, is no longer necessary." Nor did he fail to see the consequences of such a policy. "The time may come—it may be near at hand—when America, to preserve free institutions for her own people, will be compelled to carry the banner of liberation across the waters of the Atlantic, and advance towards the rising sun, until every despot is swept from the face of Europe." He even dreamed of leagues of nations and disarmament: "When the day comes a great federation of European republics will clasp hands across the ocean, with this mighty union of states, and kings, standing armies, aristocracies and established churches will become the fossil monsters of a dark and brutal past."⁸²

Perhaps the most striking result of his European experience was his temporary reconversion to the doctrine of tariff protection. He evidently found European working conditions far

⁸⁰ Numerous accounts of these debates are given in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 9.

⁸¹ A. J. Pegler, "Some stories of Ignatius Donnelly," in the *Minneapolis Tribune*, January 6, 1901.

⁸² Extracts from a speech reported in the *Minneapolis Tribune*, September 30, 1888.

worse than he had imagined and he desired to prevent the American workingman from descending to the living scale of the laboring classes of Europe. "I tell you," he said, "that while we must do justice to the agricultural population, while we must take off of their shoulders every unnecessary burden, we must interpose a wall of protection against the underpaid, the starving labor of the old world."⁸³ "For every factory that is busy there in England there must be one idle in this country if we are to have free trade. For every stomach that is filled there, one must be pinched here."⁸⁴ Donnelly was indeed, as one contemporary wrote, "a veritable conundrum with the key thrown away."⁸⁵ His inconsistencies and his consistencies alike baffle understanding. In one frame of mind he steadfastly maintained in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary the impossible theories of *Atlantis*, *Ragnarok*, and the Baconian cipher; in another, he switched from high tariff to low tariff, from low tariff to high tariff, and then back again, for inside of two years after his return from England he was defending the free-trade position once more.⁸⁶ Perhaps there was no tariff policy sufficiently irrational to be at home in his erratic mind.

It is not surprising that in his later writings Donnelly refused to be bound by the limitations of the scientist or the literary critic, and selected romance as the most fitting medium for the expression of his views. In the year 1889, following a humiliating defeat for the United States senatorship⁸⁷ (for he was back in politics again), he began work on a book which reflected his pessimism. Donnelly had a way of identifying his own political fortunes with the success or failure of reform, and from this point of view it seemed evident that the cause of reform had

⁸³ *Daily Globe*, September 6, 1888.

⁸⁴ *Pioneer Press*, October 31, 1888.

⁸⁵ Clipping from the *Public Spirit* (Mankato), September 13, 1888, in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 6.

⁸⁶ Resolutions offered by Donnelly at a Farmers' alliance convention held in March, 1890, demanded "Radical revision and reduction of the national tariff on imports, and the putting of salt, coal, iron, sugar, lumber and materials for the manufacture of twine on the free list." *Minneapolis Journal*, March 6, 1890. "Some shallow people," he had declared two years before, "will tell you that Donnelly is changing so often. . . . It is the parties that have been wiggling about." *Pioneer Press*, October 31, 1888.

⁸⁷ Smalley, *History of the republican party*, 231; *Pioneer Press*, January 18, 1889; *Minneapolis Tribune*, January 18, 1889.

little chance of success. The result of Donnelly's meditations was the publication in June, 1890, of a novel entitled *Cæsar's column*, in which the author maintained that if the present state of things continued for another hundred years it would end in the destruction of civilization as well as liberty the whole world over.⁸⁸ *Cæsar's column* was Donnelly's most popular work, and sold by the hundreds of thousands of copies, although it possessed little literary merit. Some said that it imitated Bellamy's *Looking backward*, but it was really quite the reverse. Bellamy dreamed of an ideal state of society where all wrongs should be righted; Donnelly looked forward to something closely akin to the current conception of bolshevism. He foresaw a time when the lower classes, stung by their increasing wrongs, would join together in a great "Brotherhood of Destruction," including millions of members the world over, whose efforts would finally culminate in the annihilation of society itself. The book, to escape unmerited criticism, was published under an assumed name and was not for some time attributed to Donnelly. Its phenomenal success is evidence of the profound unrest of the times from which the populist movement took root and grew.⁸⁹ Donnelly, it should be said, did not preach violence; on the contrary, he taught that all necessary reforms should be made to escape violence. But he did believe that unless the wrongs of the masses were righted a social cataclysm would result.⁹⁰

During the eighties Donnelly the author and orator somewhat overshadowed Donnelly the politician. But the politician was by no means dead. Indeed, the versatile Minnesotan was disposed rather to turn to good account politically the advertising which came to him by reason of his books and lectures. Because he wrote and discoursed on subjects covering so wide a range of popular interest he could count on friends and supporters in

⁸⁸ Ignatius Donnelly, *Cæsar's column: a story of the twentieth century*, by Edmund Boisgilbert, M.D. (Chicago, 1890).

⁸⁹ Numerous comments on *Cæsar's column*, both pro and con, are to be found in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 8.

⁹⁰ Inspired by the success of *Cæsar's column*, Donnelly produced in quick succession two other novels. One of them, *Doctor Huguet; a novel*, by Edmund Boisgilbert, M.D. (Chicago, 1891), was a story in defense of negro rights, and the other, called *The golden bottle; or the story of Ephraim Benezet of Kansas* (New York, 1892), dealt with free silver and other reforms. Neither achieved anything like the success which came to *Cæsar's column*.

all walks of life, and he frequently won a hearing for his political views in enemy strongholds where, but for his literary and forensic fame, he must assuredly have been denied.

For a few years after his failure to win Washburn's seat in congress Donnelly remained in a self-imposed retirement from politics, but in 1884 under circumstances which could hardly be called compelling, he reappeared in the political arena. In that year as the democratic candidate from his district for congress he had the satisfaction of cutting down the normal republican majority of seven or eight thousand to seven or eight hundred votes.⁹¹ But this time the closeness of the decision did not inspire him to contest the election, although he did feel that the democratic party owed him something for making the race. Frankly basing his claim on the "lame-duck" plea, he asked of the incoming Cleveland administration appointment as surveyor-general of Minnesota—an office which carried with it a stipend of but two thousand dollars, and for which he had no fitness whatever. Donnelly did not scruple to plead that his great services to the democratic party in the state entitled him at least to this petty office, the proceeds of which he could use to good advantage in buying books for his library! The democratic state central committee, it chanced, was dominated by men of great wealth whom Donnelly had again and again affronted. It no doubt gave them great delight to announce that he should not receive the surveyor-generalship, or any other office, if they could help it. Their influence seems to have been decisive, for Donnelly continued to pay for his own books.⁹²

In the rôle of party regular Donnelly was distinctly out of place.⁹³ Not until the Farmers' alliance come into prominence did he again find a part which he was fitted to play. This organ-

⁹¹ An adequate account of this election is in Fish, *Donnelliana*, 104. Besides the democratic nomination Donnelly had also Farmers' alliance and greenback support. But the greenback party was virtually dead, and the alliance was regarded as a nonpolitical organization.

⁹² *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul), April 19, 1885; October 12, 22, 1888.

⁹³ Donnelly described himself in 1886 "As one who has heretofore for many years co-operated with the Democratic party, who now desires its growth and triumph and would like to see it what its founder, Thomas Jefferson, intended it should be—the fearless defender of the rights of mankind." From a Donnelly circular letter in the Castle papers, dated August 20, 1886. But in 1891 Donnelly declared that he had never voted the democratic ticket in his life. Clipping from the *Duluth Tribune*, October 22, 1891, in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 9.

ization had made its appearance in Minnesota as early as 1881, and had grown steadily in numbers and importance.⁹⁴ It was a non-partisan affair, closely resembling the grange of the seventies, and seeking the alleviation of much the same agricultural grievances—low prices of grain, unfair systems of grading, elevator frauds, excessive railway rates, inadequate and discriminatory transportation, exorbitant interest charges, and the like. The alliance taught independence of party affiliation, but advised its members to vote only for men who would act in the interest of the farmers. By 1886 its influence was too strong to be ignored, and in the campaign of that year both parties made an earnest effort to conciliate the farmer vote. The democrats named for governor Dr. Albert A. Ames, whose record as mayor of Minneapolis had won hearty applause from the reform forces, and the republicans, with a less satisfactory candidate, A. R. McGill, wrote into their resolutions every demand that the alliance forces made.⁹⁵

Donnelly saw great possibilities in the growing spirit of coöperation among the farmers, and naturally he could not long resist the temptation to offer his leadership to this new movement for reform. He found, however, that the constituted authorities of the alliance were not altogether willing to yield their place to him. There was, to begin with, a total disagreement as to the ticket which the alliance should support in the forthcoming election. The alliance officers quite generally favored the democratic candidates, while Donnelly leaned decidedly toward the republicans.⁹⁶ The nomination of Ames, he contended, had not rid the democratic state central committee of the party

⁹⁴ Considerable light is thrown upon the early history of the alliance in Minnesota by a report of the alliance state secretary, Eric Olson, printed in the *Great West* (St. Paul), February 14, 1890.

⁹⁵ Smalley, *History of the republican party*, 220; *Pioneer Press*, September 15, 23, 1886.

⁹⁶ Personal feeling no doubt had something to do with Donnelly's attitude. He told the truth when he wrote to a friend that "the democratic party has pretty emphatically said that it wants nothing to do with me. . . . I have been beaten for Congress by the Hill-Kelly crowd, beaten for the surveyor-generalship, deprived of the slightest recognition by the Executive, read out of the party by the Democratic state central committee, defeated in my own county, and even yet daily cartooned by the Democratic state newspaper organ. A thoroughbred Democrat would find it hard to digest this treatment; but to one who is an Independent, and who has only co-operated with the Democrats as an ally, it is especially galling." Donnelly to J. L. McDonald, October 6, 1886, Donnelly papers.

bosses—men who were the open and uncompromising enemies of reform. Furthermore, the democratic convention had refused to hear a committee of farmers and laborers who sought to present to it their views—a committee of which, incidentally, Donnelly was the chief spokesman. On the other hand, this same committee had been most cordially received by the republican convention a few days before, and Donnelly had been given an ovation. As to the platforms themselves, Donnelly found the democratic document vague and misleading, whereas the republican resolutions were on some points even stronger than the reformers had asked.⁹⁷ But Donnelly's loudly proclaimed preferences were entirely ignored. Although making no recommendation officially, the majority of the alliance leaders evidently favored Ames, and they were able to deliver to him sufficient alliance votes to reduce the republican majority to a mere handful.⁹⁸ Donnelly remained aloof from the state campaign, nursing equal grievances against the democratic machine and those alliance officers who had refused to follow where he led. He made every effort thereafter to belittle the men who had, as he thought, betrayed the alliance.⁹⁹ They learned to hate and fear him, and they constituted a little nucleus around whom gathered as time went on many other reformers who for one reason or another fell out with Donnelly. He never again knew what it was to have the undivided support of the reform element.

Failing to dictate to the alliance officers, Donnelly now determined, regardless of them, to take over the active control of the reform forces within the state. Against strenuous opposition he had succeeded in securing a seat as an independent in the lower house of the state legislature.¹ Here, because of his out-

⁹⁷ The committee referred to was a joint committee of thirty appointed from members of the Farmers' alliance and Knights of labor, and more or less officially authorized to sound out the two party conventions on their attitude toward reform. Donnelly's report is given in the *Pioneer Press*, September 24, 1886.

⁹⁸ Smalley, *History of the republican party*, 224-225.

⁹⁹ His sentiments were well reflected in a letter from the state lecturer of the alliance, at that time one of his trusted friends. "What must the Alliance do to be saved?" it ran. "In my humble judgment it will have to *unload* and throw overboard a few Jonah's or go to the bottom. It has done much good as an agitator but as a cohesive power it has been a total failure. It needs a thorough reorganization." See Thomas C. Hodgson to Donnelly, November 21, 1866, in the Donnelly papers.

¹ Donnelly first sought a nomination at the hands of the democrats of his

standing ability and his long political experience, he felt that he could easily make himself the leader of the alliance members, and with their solid support he might hope to force the republicans, who had a majority in each house, to redeem their campaign pledges.² This would not only secure reform legislation, but it would also serve to discredit those alliance leaders who had planned another course.

Long before the legislature met Donnelly was hard at work on his plan to unite the farmer vote. Through an extensive correspondence carried on with his friends in various parts of the state he found out definitely the names of all the farmer members elected to the house of representatives, and all other members who might reasonably be expected to support the farmers' cause.³ To these prospective followers he sent in due time a circular letter⁴ in which he asked them to assemble at an appointed place and hour on the day before the opening of the legislative session. The object of the meeting he described to be the formation of a farmer organization with which to combat the "wily politicians." It might even be possible to agree on a farmers' candidate for speaker. Donnelly's overtures met with an immediate and favorable response.⁵ The farmers only awaited a leader—they flocked willingly to his standard, applauded his propositions, and at their first gathering even agreed that it would be wise to meet from time to time during the session to decide in advance what their attitude toward newly proposed legislation would be.⁶

county, only to have his purpose thwarted by the local agents of the state democratic machine. But he was not to be denied. "By the use of money," he charged, "the Ring packed the caucus even in my own county, whereupon the people of the county, irrespective of party, nominated me for the lower house, and I was elected by nearly 500 majority, although \$20,000 were spent in the county to compass my defeat." Donnelly to Secretary Lamar, January 1, 1889, Donnelly papers.

² "I have concluded that you are about right," Thomas C. Hodgson wrote to Donnelly early in the campaign. "The republicans ought to win. They have the platform and a thorough organization of the farmers will be able to compel enforcement of the provisions of that platform." September 30, 1886, Donnelly papers.

³ Numerous letters in the Donnelly papers, November, December, 1886, substantiate these statements.

⁴ Dated November 15, 1886, Donnelly papers.

⁵ See, for example, a letter of C. G. Johnsrud to Donnelly, dated November 26, 1886, in the Donnelly papers.

⁶ *Pioneer Press*, January 4, 1887.

With the legislature in session early in 1887 Donnelly speedily allied himself with the republicans. So great was their anxiety to please him that he might possibly have obtained the speakership had he so desired, but he preferred to elevate an aspiring young politician named William R. Merriam to that honor, and to receive in return an appointment as chairman of the all-important committee on railroads, and membership on the judiciary, educational, and grain and warehouse inspection committees. He thus became easily the most powerful man in the house.⁷ "Never in the history of our state," wrote one observer, "has it been in the power of one man to do so much good . . . by leading the friends of Equal Rights in their battle against monopoly."⁸

But Donnelly's record in the lower house duplicated in entirely too many ways his earlier record in the senate. It would be wearisome and profitless to recount it. He championed every radical or sensational measure presented, and he himself introduced no less than fifty-seven bills, of which not more than one-third ever emerged even in highly amended form as laws.⁹ Judged from any standpoint except that of the achievement of notoriety, his legislative record could not be termed a success. "Donnelly entered the legislature," one editor exclaimed, "with the confidence of a large following. He started out as a powerful leader, but he has shown a wonderful lack of real power or ability. . . . [He] is brilliant, but vain and impractical. He has some good ideas but ruins all by attempting to carry everything to the extreme and riding rough-shod over all opposition. He has tired and sickened the legislature with his verbosity, and has lost his following by the continued advocacy of impractical measures."¹⁰

It should be noted, however, that Donnelly's unpopularity was

⁷ Hall, *Observations*, 224.

⁸ John F. Ames to Donnelly, January 10, 1887, Donnelly papers.

⁹ The *Labor Echo*, October 20, 1888, examines carefully Donnelly's legislative record. See also clipping dated October 18, 1888, in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 6. The most important of Donnelly's bills to become law granted wide powers of rate regulation to the state railway commission, but the United States supreme court declared it unconstitutional. Donnelly was ever afterward an implacable foe of the doctrine of judicial review. *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1890, p. 555; *Representative* (St. Paul), June 28, 1893.

¹⁰ *Hastings Democrat*, March 10, 1887, quoting the *Owatonna Journal*. Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 6.

greater among the politicians than among the people. Those who had a grievance always knew that they had in him a champion. His friends attributed his failure to the desire of opponents to bury a man who "towered head and shoulders" above them in intellectual strength, and they steadfastly refused to regard him as "a political corpse."¹¹ Nor did Donnelly plan to eschew politics. To be sure, he occupied himself mainly in the months following this session with Shakespearean studies, and early in 1888 he went abroad, but he had in mind all the while to renew the fight for reform when the next legislature should convene.

No sooner had Donnelly returned from Europe than he found himself drawn precipitately into a new political movement. Labor leaders, with some farmer support, had conceived the idea of welding together the various organizations of workers into a new and powerful third party. In a national way this agitation found expression at Cincinnati in February, 1887, when delegates representing more than a dozen reform groups pooled their interests to form the union labor party.¹² During the summer of 1888 the movement took root in Minnesota. A conference of labor leaders, with the assent of a few alliance men, formed for the state what they were pleased to call the farm and labor party. Their platform embraced all the latest reform ideas, except on the tariff, where it was carefully trimmed to fit the new views which Donnelly was reputed to have brought back from Europe. And Donnelly, although he had just reached Minnesota, and was not fully informed as to the probable strength or weakness of the movement, was nominated for governor. With manifest hesitation he accepted the nomination, advising the delegates to "go back to their homes and talk the matter over" before deciding definitely that they wanted him to make the race.¹³

After a few weeks Donnelly virtually took the decision into his own hands, and withdrew his name. He had started out to make an energetic campaign, and had delivered several farm

¹¹ *St. Paul Globe*, March 7, 1887.

¹² *Pioneer Press*, February 24, 1887; *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1888, p. 778; Haynes, *Third party movements*, 206.

¹³ *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1888, p. 559; *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 29, 1888; *Pioneer Press*, August 29, 1888; see also numerous clippings in Donnelly serapbooks, volume 6.

and labor speeches, but he soon discovered that he had back of him no organization worthy of the name. There was no money for campaign expenses, or even for the printing of ballots—a matter of great concern before the Australian system of voting was adopted. To contend with the old parties under such circumstances was to Donnelly's mind like "spitting against Niagara."¹⁴ Also, he found that a large majority of the alliance men were as yet indifferent, or even hostile, to a definite third party program, preferring rather to work through one or the other of the older parties. Moreover, certain reasons of a more personal nature influenced him to withdraw. He wished to return to the state legislature "to carry out the legislation which had failed two years ago," and if he ran for governor he could not well run for state representative at the same time. His enemies observed, too, that he had his eye fixed on a seat in the United States senate, and he would be in a better position to push his candidacy for that post as a member of the state house of representatives than as the defeated champion of a lost cause.¹⁵

After his withdrawal Donnelly came out openly in favor of the republican ticket, and campaigned actively for it all over the state. Under the circumstances this attitude was not surprising. Nationally, the republican stand in favor of a protective tariff suited his newly acquired views perfectly.¹⁶ Locally, the republicans pleased him in many ways. They had recognized his ability by allowing him high committee appointments in the last legislature; they had permitted him to appear before their state convention and to address that body, even while he was a candidate for governor on the farm and labor ticket; most of all, they had nominated his protégé, Merriam, for the governorship. Nor is it likely that these actions were unaccompanied by flattering promises, which were never intended to be kept.¹⁷

¹⁴ *St. Paul Dispatch*, October 11, 1888; *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1888, p. 559; Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 6.

¹⁵ Clippings dated October, 1888, in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 6.

¹⁶ See *ante*, 103.

¹⁷ *St. Paul Dispatch*, October 11, 1888; *Minneapolis Journal*, September 29, 1888; *Pioneer Press*, October 22, 1888. Donnelly said later that if the farm and labor party had not placed him in nomination he would have gone into the republican state convention to vote for Merriam. But he disliked to desert his friends. *Pioneer Press*, October 12, 1888.

Donnelly's withdrawal probably benefited the republicans, for they won easily, but it brought him small reward. He lost his seat in the legislature by a margin of less than a hundred votes;¹⁸ he commanded the support of only a handful of alliance men in his race for the United States senate;¹⁹ and he was ever afterwards regarded by those who had organized the farm and labor party as a traitor to "the cause." This campaign did much, also, to increase the number of those who held that Donnelly was primarily a place-seeker and a turncoat who would willingly adopt any means or serve under any banner to advance himself politically.²⁰

Donnelly did not wholly merit this reputation. He was always easily flattered and easily duped. No doubt he believed sincerely that in lending his support to the republicans he was doing the best thing possible for "the people," for whose welfare he had a real and lasting passion. "You must be independent of political parties," he told a Minneapolis audience during the campaign, "and yet ready to use them when it is to your advantage. Parties represent colossal masses of unreasoning votes; when you can compel a political party to fight your battles, you force all this horde of barbarians into the column that defends you. It is sometimes easier to correct a party than a people. A compact minority, wisely balancing itself and holding itself calmly together, amid the clamors of howling armies and mercenaries, can throw itself into either side, and eventually decide the conflict, and carry off the fruits of the victory."²¹

Deprived of his legislative prominence, and balked in his senatorial ambitions, Donnelly turned his attention in 1889 and 1890 to the further building up of the Farmers' alliance.²² He accepted the post of state lecturer, and with an able force of

¹⁸ *St. Paul Globe*, November 17, 1888.

¹⁹ *Pioneer Press*, January 12, 18, 1889. Donnelly was the populist candidate in 1895 for the United States senatorship, but failed then as ignominiously as in 1889. In both cases it seems that he really thought that he might be chosen.

²⁰ Donnelly's connection with the farm and labor party is explained, and his course defended, in the *Great West*, February 21, May 23, 1890.

²¹ Address delivered in Minneapolis, September 29, 1888, and reported in the *Minneapolis Tribune*, September 30, 1888. See also Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 6.

²² The *Great West*, a radical weekly newspaper edited by Dr. Everett W. Fish, gave great attention to Donnelly's activities, and furnished him valuable support. If not so in name, it was in fact the official alliance sheet. The first issue was published October 18, 1889.

deputies he began to spread alliance principles with a vigor never known before. Conditions favored his work. Whatever the prosperity of other classes during the eighties, the lot of the farmer grew steadily more unendurable. Even abundant harvests of grain seemed only to glut the markets, and to depress the value of cereal products until the grower was fortunate indeed if he realized more than the bare cost of production. Mortgages were universal and interest rates high.²³ Donnelly and his lieutenants so skillfully played upon the farmers' misfortunes that the new alliance chapters in the state began to be numbered by the scores and hundreds. In 1890 it was printed on the official alliance stationery that "During the year preceding the annual meeting of March 4, 1890, 235 new alliances were formed; and nearly 800 in all appeared on the roll of the State Alliance. Within one month after the annual meeting of 1890 nearly 100 new Alliances have been organized and the cry is 'still they come.' We hope to have 1000 . . . by the middle of the year."²⁴

Since Donnelly was undoubtedly more responsible for these results than any other man in Minnesota, many of his friends urged that he be elevated to the presidency of the state alliance as a fit and proper reward. They felt too, as one editor said, that "The men now at the head of this organization are not competent to lead this army to victory, and they must give place to men who are equal to the emergency."²⁵ Probably Donnelly concurred fully in the view that the time had come when it would be the part of wisdom to give him full control. He knew his own competence, and was willing to do his part.

At the annual meeting of the state alliance in March, 1890, Donnelly's friends presented his name for the office of president, no doubt confidently expecting the triumph of their favorite. But the anti-Donnelly forces had also been active, and had agreed upon an opposition candidate, R. J. Hall, who defeated Donnelly by a few votes.²⁶ It was urged successfully that Don-

²³ *Nation*, 50:269, 329; *Pioneer Press*, February 2, 1888, March 6, 1890; Buck, *The agrarian crusade*, chapter 7.

²⁴ Abundant in the Donnelly papers, June, July, 1890.

²⁵ *Great West*, March 7, 1890.

²⁶ *St. Paul News*, March 6, 1890; *Great West*, March 7, 1890; *Pioneer Press*, March 7, 1890.

nelly was too conspicuous as a politician to head the alliance, and that he was in too close fellowship with the republicans. He opened himself to the latter charge when he smoothed the way for his friend Merriam, then governor, to deliver before the convention a low-tariff speech calculated to win alliance support for the republican ticket when the governor should be a candidate for reelection in the fall.²⁷ Nevertheless, Donnelly's influence in the convention was great. He was allowed to revise the alliance constitution, to state in a lengthy platform of principles the political views of the convention, and by a unanimous vote to retain his position as state lecturer and organizer.²⁸

Earlier, even, than the March convention there was a strong movement under way in favor of the transformation of the alliance into an independent political party. Its size and continued growth both suggested and made feasible such a project. Indeed, if the farmers could only be persuaded to stand solidly together, as now it seemed they might, they could outvote all other classes, and could take control of the government of the state. And, since the alliance program called for reform through legislation — legislation which the older parties had seen fit, for the most part, to deny — the logic of the situation seemed to call for the nomination and election in 1890 of a straight alliance ticket, which would put into effect without delay the reforms which the farmers demanded. The circumstances were carefully considered during the March convention, but it was finally decided to leave to the discretion of the executive committee, composed of all the state officers, the calling of a nominating convention to place a third party ticket in the field.²⁹

Strangely enough, Donnelly was not especially pleased with this turn of affairs. No one believed more steadfastly in alliance principles than did he, and no one had worked more earnestly to make the alliance a success, but when independent political action was suggested he demurred. Perhaps he felt that the

²⁷ *St. Paul News*, March 6, 1890; *Pioneer Press*, March 5, 1890. The speeches of Donnelly and Merriam before the convention are published in full in the *Great West*, March 14, 1890.

²⁸ *Minneapolis Journal*, March 7, 1890; *St. Paul News*, March 7, 1890; *Pioneer Press*, March 7, 1890.

²⁹ *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1890, p. 299; *Nation*, 51: 42; *St. Paul Globe*, March 7, 1890.

possibilities of coöperation with the republicans had not yet been exhausted, as his course in presenting Governor Merriam to the March convention seemed to indicate. Or, perhaps he believed that the movement among the rank and file was not yet strong enough to warrant the leaders to proceed.³⁰ No man ever learned less from experience than did Donnelly, yet he could hardly have been wholly blind to the failures which had overtaken him in the past when he had attempted to lead without a ready band of followers behind him.

Whatever Donnelly may have thought, the demand for a straight alliance ticket was irresistible. The March convention had scarcely adjourned before the local chapters began to be heard from on the subject. So insistently did they urge that the alliance "go into politics" that even Donnelly was convinced, and at length joined with the other members of the executive committee to call the desired convention for July 16, 1890.³¹

But Donnelly's tardiness in responding to popular desire cost him the alliance nomination for governor — a nomination to which it would seem that his life-long labors for reform had entitled him. His enemies charged him with insincerity, and pointed to his record in 1888, when he had withdrawn from the farm and labor ticket in favor of Merriam. To nominate Donnelly in 1890, they said, would be to turn the alliance over to the republicans.³² And they won converts by their talk. This nettled Donnelly. "I came here," he told the delegates to the July convention, "with the intention of absolutely refusing to permit my name to be used in this convention, but I tell you this: If it is the sense of this body, with anything like unanimity, that I should lead your cause . . . I am ready to raise your banner aloft and carry it, my friends, so help me God, until the sun goes down on the day of election."³³ After repeated balloting, however, it was found impossible to nominate Donnelly, and S. M. Owen, the editor of a Minneapolis farm journal, was selected to head the ticket. Donnelly was not even permitted

³⁰ *St. Paul News*, June 17, 1890; *Great West*, June 20, 1890; *St. Paul Globe*, July 1, 1890.

³¹ *St. Paul Dispatch*, June 16, 17, 1890; *St. Paul Globe*, July 1, 1890; *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1890, p. 556; Smalley, *History of the republican party*, 232.

³² *St. Paul Globe*, July 2, 11, 17, 18, 1890; *Minneapolis Journal*, July 18, 1890; *St. Paul News*, July 18, 1890.

³³ *St. Paul Globe*, July 18, 1890.

to write the platform upon which the alliance candidates should stand.³⁴

The results of the election of 1890 revealed how vast were the possibilities of the new movement. Donnelly was convinced that the farmers would have won had he only headed their ticket. As it was, Owen polled 58,514 votes to 85,844 for Wilson, the democratic candidate, and 88,111 for Merriam. The Farmers' alliance and democrats had nominated the same man for the office of state auditor, and he was of course elected by an overwhelming majority. Because of the alliance defection the republicans lost to the democrats every congressional district in the state but one, while the alliance elected enough members of the legislature to hold the balance of power in each house. It sent Donnelly to the state senate in spite of the active opposition of both the old parties.³⁵

With the movement assuming such proportions Donnelly began to feel more than ever aggrieved that he who had laid the foundation for all this success should occupy in it only a secondary position. More than that, those highest in authority sought to discredit him with the alliance hosts—even to brand him as one who had planned to betray the cause. During the summer of 1890 he had actually been told by President Hall that his presence at a certain alliance gathering was not desired! "I would not go through another year like the last for all the gold in Golconda," he wrote to a friend. "Every meeting of the Executive Committee was a battle. Whatever I proposed for the good of the order was opposed by Hall because I proposed it."³⁶ Donnelly resolved that nothing short of his triumphant election to the presidency of the alliance would be an adequate vindication of the course he had pursued. "I have determined," he said in a circular letter issued to the alliance, "—putting all modesty aside—to present to you my own name for the office of President . . . If you have faith in me; if you believe that for a quarter of a century I have fought the battles

³⁴ *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1890, p. 556; *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 18, 1890; *Great West*, July 25, 1890; *St. Paul News*, July 18, 1890.

³⁵ *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1890, p. 557; Smalley, *History of the republican party*, 236; Fish, *Donnelliana*, 83; *Great West*, November 14, December 5, 1890.

³⁶ Donnelly letter books, 5: 289, in the possession of the Minnesota historical society.

of the people, without a shade of variation or turning; if you believe that the railroad corporations of this state have not money enough to buy me to desert the cause of the people . . . then I ask you to support me.”³⁷ By appealing over the heads of the leaders to the actual farmers who furnished the votes Donnelly easily secured a large majority of the delegates to the next alliance convention pledged to support his candidacy. In December, 1890, he received the office which he coveted,³⁸ and during the four years he held it Donnelly and the Minnesota alliance became practically interchangeable terms.

An additional reason why Donnelly had fought so hard to secure the presidency of the alliance was that he believed the office would enable him to speak more authoritatively on alliance matters when he should again take his place in the state legislature. There he hoped to combine the alliance forces with either democrats or republicans in order once again to fight for the farmers’ program of reform.³⁹ In this, as usual, he fell far short of success. He was able to bring about a temporary fusion with the democrats, and to agree upon certain plans for legislation, but in the long run his legislative activities in 1891 were no more productive of results than his previous efforts in the same direction. It was not without reason that a St. Paul paper declared at the end of the session that “No man on the floor of either house did as much as Ignatius Donnelly to prevent the enactment of wise and needed laws. He was not the author of a single constructive measure of any value . . . and by his endless chattering, his buffoonery, his appeals to the gallery, he frittered away the golden hours in which something might have been achieved.”⁴⁰

Meanwhile certain preliminary steps had been taken toward the formation of a nation-wide party of the people. In December, 1889, a national labor congress, representing the various Farmers’ alliances, Agricultural wheels, Knights of labor, and kindred organizations, met in St. Louis, and though effecting no organic union they joined in the adoption of a set of demands not far

³⁷ *Great West*, December 5, 1890.

³⁸ *St. Paul News*, December 31, 1890.

³⁹ Donnelly letter books, 4: 196.

⁴⁰ *St. Paul Globe*, April 29, 1891. Volume 8 of the Donnelly scrapbooks contains a wealth of material on the activities of this session.

different from those eventually incorporated into the famous Omaha platform of the people's party. The growing feeling of fraternity among all members of the working classes was still further attested by a great gathering of alliance and labor forces at Ocala, Florida, in November, 1890, where much the same program of reform was proclaimed. In the elections of 1890 the state alliances very generally went into politics, and with the help of labor votes they won such success that they held a third convention in Cincinnati in May, 1891, and definitely determined to launch a new political party.⁴¹

By the time of the Cincinnati convention Donnelly was in full control of the alliance movement in Minnesota, and ready to lend his influence to the creation of a national organization. He led the Minnesota delegation to Cincinnati, and took an active part—perhaps the most active part—in the proceedings of the convention. He brought himself to the fore in an early session by a motion which, if adopted, would have committed the convention at the outset to the third party idea. He was opposed by Weaver of Iowa, who favored a more deliberate course, and the motion failed. But if Donnelly's action was a trifle premature it was nevertheless in line with the sentiment of the great majority of the delegates, who followed only a few days later the course he had suggested.⁴²

Donnelly figured also as chairman of the committee on resolutions at Cincinnati, and he acquitted himself in this capacity with such skill that a place on the platform committee of people's party conventions was thereafter regarded as his by a sort of vested right. This accounts in no small part for the fact that the manifold criticisms aimed at the populist movement seldom struck at the English of its platforms. At Cincinnati Donnelly cut the Gordian knot of dissension among the reform forces by

⁴¹ *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1890, p. 299; Haynes, *Third party movements*, 230; Frank L. McVey, *The populist movement* (American economic association, *Economic studies*, volume 1, number 3—New York, 1896), 138; Buck, *The agrarian crusade*, 140.

⁴² *Pioneer Press*, May 20, 1891. That Donnelly's course attracted wide attention is shown by the numerous clippings in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 8, dated *circa* May 21, 1890. He claimed later that he originated the scheme of a people's party and carried it through the Cincinnati convention in 1891. *Pioneer Press*, August 29, 1894. Occasional handbills in his papers refer to him as the "father of the Populist party."

these magic words: "We are not here so much to proclaim a creed as to erect a banner under which the marching hosts of reform can rally." The resolutions carefully evaded all controversial material. "We believe," said Donnelly, "that the party that, in such a crisis as this, shortens its platforms, lengthens its muster roll."⁴³

Though the Cincinnati decision insured the formation of a third party, it was thought desirable to come into agreement with another convention called for St. Louis, February 22, 1892, before nominations should be considered. Representatives from twenty-two different labor, alliance, and reform organizations composed the St. Louis conference, and sought earnestly to find some common ground upon which all could stand. Donnelly was the man of the hour. His knowledge of parliamentary law enabled him to smooth out many of the tangles in which the convention became enmeshed; when tendencies toward acidity developed he kept the delegates in good humor by his wit and oratory; and as a member of the platform committee he again lifted up the banner of reform.⁴⁴ The resolutions committee reported both a preamble and a platform. The preamble was written entirely by Donnelly, read by him before the conference to the accompaniment of tumultuous applause, and to this day it remains the most famous document in populist history. Reproducing the argument of *Cæsar's column*, it pointed to the condition of the country and of the world in justification of the new movement. "A vast conspiracy against mankind" was envisaged, which only the intelligent coöperation of the working classes could overthrow. Failure to accomplish this end would bring the nation face to face with "terrible social convulsions, the destruction of civilization, or the establishment of an absolute despotism." With this challenge ringing in their ears the delegates adjourned, having made provision for another convention to meet at Omaha, Nebraska, July 4, 1892, to make nominations.⁴⁵

⁴³ Clipping from a Cincinnati paper, dated May 21, 1891, in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 8.

⁴⁴ McVey, *Populist movement*, 140; *St. Paul Globe*, February 25, 1892; *Pioneer Press*, February 25, 1892. Numerous clippings from St. Louis papers are preserved in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 11.

⁴⁵ The preamble read by Donnelly at St. Louis differs in some details from the

Donnelly of course played an important part in the proceedings at Omaha. He was repeatedly talked of as the candidate of the new party for the presidency, but his many idiosyncracies were so many disqualifications, and it was realized that his nomination would have been as great a mistake as was the nomination of Greeley in 1872. No one wished to deny him a place on the platform committee, however, and his success in that capacity at St. Louis was repeated at Omaha. Probably the Omaha platform, nine-tenths of which Donnelly claimed to have written, expressed his political views better than any other single document. It demanded government ownership and control of the railroads, with appointments to railroad offices to be made "under a civil service regulation of the most rigid character"; "a national currency, safe, sound and flexible" to be distributed

preamble of the Omaha platform. Following is Donnelly's original version of that familiar document:

"The conditions which surround us justify our co-operation. We meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political and material ruin. Corruption dominates the ballot box, the Legislatures, the Congress, and touches even the ermine of the Bench. The people are demoralized. Many of the states have been compelled to isolate the voters at the polling places in order to prevent universal intimidation or bribery. The newspapers are subsidized or muzzled, public opinion silenced, business prostrated, our homes covered with mortgages, labor impoverished, and the land concentrating in the hands of capitalists. The urban workmen are denied the right of organization for self-protection; imported pauperized labor beats down their wages, a hireling standing army, unrecognized by our laws, is established to shoot them down, and they are rapidly degenerating to European conditions. The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes, unprecedented in the history of mankind and the possessors of these in turn despise the republic and endanger liberty. From the same prolific womb of governmental injustice we breed the two classes — tramps and millionaires. The national power to create money is appropriated to enrich bondholders; silver, which has been accepted as coin since the dawn of history, has been demonetized to add to the purchasing power of gold by decreasing the value of all forms of property as well as human labor; and the supply of currency is purposely abridged to fatten usurers, bankrupt enterprise, and enslave industry. A vast conspiracy against mankind has been organized on two continents, and is taking possession of the world. If not met and overthrown it forbodes terrible social convulsions, the destruction of civilization, or the establishment of an absolute despotism. In this crisis of human affairs the intelligent working people and producers of the United States have come together, in the name of peace, order and society to defend liberty, property and justice. We desire our union and independence. We assert our purpose to vote with the political organization which represents our principles."

Printed in the *Great West*, March 4, 1892. The *Pioneer Press*, February 25, 1892, recognized in these phrases a "stereotyped Donnellian wail of woe."

direct to the people; the free and unlimited coinage of silver at the ratio of sixteen to one; a graduated income tax; retrenchment in governmental expenditures; postal savings banks; prohibition of land monopoly; and the reclamation by the government for the use of actual settlers of all railroad and alien owned lands. This program of reform, however, was to Donnelly and the true populist secondary in importance to wrenching the government from the control of the plutocrats and placing it in the hands of the people. The preamble, which Donnelly left virtually as he had read it at St. Louis, better than the actual resolutions expressed the populist views, and when Donnelly again presented his arraignment of modern society the delegates staged a demonstration which blocked all proceedings for twenty-five minutes.⁴⁶

The campaign of 1892 marks the climax of Donnelly's career. Everyone acclaimed him, his oratory, and his platforms. The great cause of reform for which he had battled so long seemed to be on the way to certain success. He found himself one of the foremost of a magnificent and genuine party of the people. "There is not in this gathering," he boasted at Omaha, "a single president of a railroad company, there is not a single representative of any of the rings which are robbing and sucking the life blood out of this American people."⁴⁷ He looked forward confidently to a new alignment of party forces. "I should not be surprised," he declared, "before the end of this campaign to see but two parties in the country, one representing Wall Street . . . and the other the great toiling masses of the American people."⁴⁸

Returning to Minnesota after these outside triumphs, Donnelly won new laurels. He crushed with unaccustomed ease a revolt against his leadership of the reform forces of the state;⁴⁹ he led the Minnesota alliance almost to a man into the ranks of the new people's party; and he secured for himself the populist

⁴⁶ *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1892, pp. 421, 753; *Great West*, July 8, 15, 1892. Numerous clippings from Omaha papers, and other cosmopolitan dailies, are to be found in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 13.

⁴⁷ *St. Paul Globe*, July 3, 1892.

⁴⁸ Clipping from the *Sioux City Journal*, July 8, 1892, in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 13.

⁴⁹ *St. Paul Globe*, July 7, 8, 1892; Smalley, *History of the republican party*, 238.

nomination for governor, and for his friends minor places on the reform ticket. He was now a real party "boss."⁵⁰

That his party would win, at least in Minnesota, Donnelly never seemed to doubt. So confident was he of success that he spurned all suggestions of fusion with the democrats,⁵¹ and declared that the new party without help could poll not less than 100,000 votes, many more than enough to win. He was not even discouraged by the republican nomination of Knute Nelson, reputed to be the strongest vote-getter in the state. Despite his sixty odd years Donnelly carried the gospel of populism personally to every corner of the state. His vitality was remarkable. On the eve of election he declared that since his nomination he had made one hundred and forty speeches, had written a book, and had gained two pounds in flesh.⁵²

The election results were deeply disappointing to Donnelly. They showed, he said, "that the People's party afforded no promise of reward for me or any other man." Instead of an easy first he found himself a poor third in the race, and his vote fell nearly 20,000 short of the vote which the alliance candidate had polled two years before. Donnelly clearly was not responsible for this slump, for he ran about 10,000 votes ahead of Weaver, and probably made a better showing than any other populist could have made in Minnesota that year.⁵³ But there was scant comfort in this. His personal ambitions were crushed—even if the forces of reform should one day triumph, the event lay so far in the future that he might not hope to participate in the fruits of victory. Ultimate triumph for the cause seemed itself uncertain, and the pessimism of *Cæsar's column* settled down on its author anew. He was never quite the same man again.

Donnelly's changed attitude was in no way more evident than in his conduct during the next session of the state legislature. Instead of the turbulent figure he had always been before he

⁵⁰ *St. Paul News*, July 15, 1892; *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 15, 1892; *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1892, p. 470.

⁵¹ *Pioneer Press*, August 11, 20, 1892. The populists, Donnelly explained later, selected two democrats for supreme court justices because they had no lawyers of their own, and the democrats in return for this favor indorsed four populist electors, but fusion went no further than this. *Representative*, April 19, 1893.

⁵² *St. Paul Globe*, November 6, 1892; *Minneapolis Tribune*, November 8, 1892.

⁵³ *Minnesota historical collections*, 13:338.

now became a sober and sensible legislator, interesting himself, actively in remedying defective bills, in supporting good ones and opposing bad ones, but showing little of the old time disposition to monopolize the session in the interest of his own measures.⁵⁴ "I yield to the judgment of the people," he said, "for the excellent reason that I cannot help myself, and I have no desire to make a factious opposition to the will of the people as expressed at the ballot-box. . . . I do not expect to be a candidate again for any other office, and at the end of the session I want to separate from all members of the senate on terms of kindness and good will."⁵⁵ During this period Donnelly began two important works of investigation. He uncovered a series of pine lands frauds by which the state lost payment for thousands of dollars worth of pine cut from the state school lands,⁵⁶ and he was chiefly instrumental also in revealing the existence in the northwest of a "coal combine," which effectually controlled the retail price of coal, and maintained it at a high figure.⁵⁷

But Donnelly found it entirely impossible to abandon the habits of a lifetime. An agitator he had always been; an agitator he always would be. Once more he ventured into the journalistic field. During the campaign of 1892 he had quarreled with Dr. Fish, whose conduct as editor of a radical weekly called the *Great West* had displeased him, and now he decided to establish a rival newspaper. The *Representative*, an official organ of the populist party in Minnesota, was the result. For each issue of this journal Donnelly wrote a page of spicy editorials, in which he fairly excelled himself as a flayer of men and measures opposed to the welfare of the "masses," whom he had made it his life work to defend. In form and content the *Representative* much resembled the *Anti-Monopolist* of earlier years.⁵⁸

Donnelly also continued to express populist views from the

⁵⁴ Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 15.

⁵⁵ *Pioneer Press*, December 16, 1892.

⁵⁶ *Report of the pine land investigation committee to the governor of Minnesota. Filed with the governor December 21, 1894* (St. Paul, 1895).

⁵⁷ *Pioneer Press*, March 24, 1893. Following this investigation Governor Nelson, on Donnelly's advice, called an antimonopoly convention to meet in Chicago, June 5, 1893. Delegates representing thirteen states attended, and passed anti-trust resolutions. Donnelly and a few followers, mostly populists, bolted the convention because the resolutions were not radical enough. *Representative*, June 7, 1893.

⁵⁸ The first number of the *Representative* was published April 19, 1893.

forum. The hard times following the panic of 1893 created a great demand for the type of oratory in which he excelled, and audiences of jobless workmen greeted with boisterous approval his denunciations of the soulless corporations that had deprived labor of the right to work, and of the supine government which refused to come to its relief. But Donnelly was always careful not to counsel unlawful measures. "The remedy," he told a mass meeting of the unemployed in St. Paul, "is not to be found in violence. . . . Those who invite outbreaks hate the laboring man."⁵⁹ "In this country," he said in a labor day speech at Anaconda, Montana, "where the ballot-box stands open, and the majority governs, if the . . . people . . . are robbed of their liberties and reduced to serfdom, no one is to blame but themselves. . . . When the majority acting through the ballot box cannot preserve their liberties, then it will be time to talk about armed revolution." But he was quick to warn statesmen of the volcano upon which they stood: "We are all of us profoundly impressed with the conviction that if some change does not take place in public affairs there will be not only political revolution but physical revolution. The masses to-day through all mining and manufacturing regions are held in check and obedience by dread of rifles and Gatling guns. As the pressure of wretchedness increases this fear may pass away, and when it does where will our country be?"⁶⁰

Donnelly kept out of politics fairly well until 1896, interesting himself, however, in free silver, the panacea to which most of the reformers of the period trusted. As early as 1876 he had denounced the demonetization of silver, and whenever he alluded to the subject thereafter it was to defend free coinage as a fitting means of increasing the money supply. He believed that the country was growing at such a rate that the volume of currency needed to be increased. "If gold and silver cannot be issued in sufficient volume," he said, "by all means let us have paper money."⁶¹

While Donnelly was too great an opportunist to omit to take

⁵⁹ *Representative*, August 30, 1893; *St. Paul Globe*, August 27, 1893.

⁶⁰ Clipping from the *Anaconda Standard* (Montana), September 6, 1893, in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 14; *Penny Press* (Minneapolis), June 8, 1894.

⁶¹ *Anti-Monopolist*, November 9, 1876; clipping from the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 16, 1891, in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 8.

advantage of the wave of passion for free silver, he never considered that item the central feature of the populist program. "The silver question is but an incident in the great struggle that covers the world," he declared.⁶² Even when he wrote a book called *The American people's money*, it proved to be a better defense of paper money than of silver, and it included between its covers arguments favoring all the reforms for which Donnelly stood. After the campaign of 1896 was over he characterized free silver as a "single temporary side issue," and declared that "bi-metalism was tolerated by us only as the lesser of two evils." "Scientific paper money, irredeemable, based on the credit and wealth of the nation, issued and its volume controlled by the nation without the intervention of banks is the populist ideal money."⁶³

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that Donnelly looked askance at the populist fusion with the democrats in 1896. It appeared to him to be a selling out of all the other and more vital principles of populism in the hope of obtaining a single insignificant reform. He earnestly desired that the populist party should preserve its separate identity, and remain faithful to the full program of the Omaha platform. Of the reforming ardor of the democrats he had grave doubts.⁶⁴

As a matter of fact fusion was no part of the original populist program in 1896. The people's party convention that year was purposely timed to meet later than the republican and democratic conventions in the expectation that the "gold-bugs" would capture both the old organizations. The free silver elements of the old parties could then be induced to coöperate in the naming of a satisfactory third party ticket, and with the forces of "plutocracy" divided, the chances of the "masses" would be good.⁶⁵ Donnelly dreamed that the populist nomina-

⁶² *Pioneer Press*, August 2, 1893. "There is no doubt," he said, "that both gold and silver should be discarded, and an international legal tender paper money established; but that is a vast reformation the world is not yet ready for; — the greater part of mankind have never yet heard of it." *Representative*, August 2, 1893.

⁶³ *Representative*, November 23, 1898.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, July 29, 1896; Haynes, *Third party movements*, 291; McVey, *Populist movement*, 182.

⁶⁵ Henry D. Lloyd, "The populists at St. Louis," in the *Review of reviews*, 14:300. "Our convention never should have been postponed until after those of the old

tion would come to him. When, however, the free-silverites captured the Chicago convention and named Bryan, the whole scheme was thwarted, and even Donnelly acquiesced apparently in the general populist determination to join with the democrats. In fact, the political views of the democratic candidate so closely accorded with Donnelly's that in later years the witty Irishman remarked that "Had there been no People's Party Mr. Bryan would never have been a presidential candidate. We put him to school and he wound up by stealing the school-books."⁶⁶

At the populist convention, however, Donnelly found his own name still mentioned for the presidency by those most hostile to fusion, now called the "middle-of-the-roaders." Immediately his old ambitions soared and he wished to see his candidacy pushed before the convention. But several of his enemies were among the Minnesota delegates, and they chose to obtain sweet revenge for the many defeats he had administered to them in previous years. They refused him his accustomed place on the platform committee, they rejected his selections for national committeemen, and they ignored his prospective candidacy for the presidential nomination.⁶⁷ The Donnelly boom forthwith collapsed, and Donnelly came home to Minnesota more disappointed, and more broken in spirit, than he ever had been before. "Our soul is weary of this whole business," he mourned. "We shall retire to our library. . . . In the domain of literature we have a realm of our own." "If we had nominated our own candidate in July and made our own campaign, we should have polled five million votes and McKinley would have been defeated." By what process of reasoning he arrived at this conclusion, it is not easy to see.⁶⁸

Donnelly supported Bryan in 1896, but his subsequent career parties with the object of catching the crumbs that might fall from the tables," a correspondent wrote to "Calamity" Weller of Iowa, July 26, 1896, in the Weller papers, in the possession of the Wisconsin historical society.

⁶⁶ *Representative*, September 28, 1898. See also files of the same paper for the weeks before the July convention, and Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 18.

⁶⁷ *Minneapolis Journal*, July 22, 1896; Donnelly scrapbooks, 18: 83, 109, 113, 161.

⁶⁸ *Representative*, July 29, 1896; December 1, 1897. In spite of his determination to retire to his library Donnelly served in the state legislature in the session of 1897, and refused to run for reelection in 1898 only because he had that year decided to be a candidate for vice-president on the middle-of-the-road ticket in 1900. *Representative*, October 5, 12, 1898.

was chiefly devoted to an unsuccessful attempt to rescue populism from the devouring jaws of a silver democracy. He placed himself at the head of a small but resolute minority, who resisted all further temptations to fusion, and avowed the belief that plutocracy could be overthrown only by a party "created expressly to fight plutocracy and which has no plutocratic element in its ranks."⁶⁹ Anxious lest the mistakes of 1896 be repeated in 1900 these middle-of-the-roaders held a convention in Cincinnati as early as 1898 to determine on a course of action. They decided in favor of immediate nominations, and they accepted a platform which the practiced Donnelly himself had written—a platform as rhetorical and impassioned as the Omaha platform of 1892. "The People's Party," it said, "was born to live and not to die. It has done more for mankind in five years than any other party has accomplished in twenty-five years. . . . We implore our fellow citizens to unite with us in one grand effort to build up a reform party that will liberate mankind." Donnelly received the vice presidential nomination, was indorsed for the same position by another convention held in 1900, and in pursuit of that office he made his last campaign. He died on the first day of the twentieth century.⁷⁰

At the time of his death Donnelly was probably the most widely known man in Minnesota. He had addressed audiences in practically every town of the state, not once or twice but repeatedly. Everyone recognized his short, plump figure, his monkish, smooth-shaven face, his tawny hair, and his genial smile. Outside of politics people liked him, and his neighbors rarely deserted him even at the ballot-box. He knew how to be entertaining and agreeable, and utterly unpretentious even in the most ordinary society. He delighted above all to show his hospitality to the many guests who came bidden or unbidden to his home in Nininger. As a conversationalist few men have excelled him.

No one ever denied Donnelly's oratorical skill. "The expression of his face, his gestures and the very pose of the man inter-

⁶⁹ *Representative*, December 1, 1897, September 14, 1898.

⁷⁰ The proceedings of this convention and the platform which it adopted are given in full in the *Representative*, September 14, 1898. A short biography of Donnelly is printed in *Appletons' annual cyclopaedia*, 1901, p. 421.

ested the audience nearly as much as his words.”⁷¹ He was “the darling of the crowd, sparkling, wayward, and incalculable. He seemed to possess the whole wide gamut of expression and emotion.”⁷² “His sarcasm and withering scorn when he is aroused and angered annihilates opposition. He can laugh an opponent ‘out of court’ by a humorous story. He can convulse an audience with merriment and the next moment send them into tears.”⁷³ It is said that he was like Wilkin Micawber in the use of language—“flowery and profuse.” As one critic puts it, “He makes a social cataclysm out of a very small tea party.”⁷⁴ This is in a measure true. Nor did his orations show great profundity of thought—he was at his best in unsparing denunciation or encomium. His argumentative triumphs were won by reasoning which was adroit and clever, but usually full of sophistry. No one could more easily make the worse appear the better reason, and apparently no one delighted more in doing so. He possessed remarkable facility in the use of statistics for this purpose, and could fairly breathe into dull figures the breath of life. Audiences listened to his deductions with interest, and almost invariably with temporary conviction.⁷⁵

It was his jokes and witticisms that won for Donnelly the applause of the crowd. He seemed to know all the old, reliable stories, and he recited them with telling effect to illustrate his points. “Wit is the sudden juxta-position of incongruous ideas,” he once declared. “Surprise is the essence of wit.”⁷⁶ Yet it mattered little how familiar were the stories Donnelly told, for it was his way of telling them that made them take. On one occasion he was engaged in a debate with a speaker who related many anecdotes supposed to be amusing, but told them so badly that they failed to interest the audience. When the “sage” took the floor to reply he abandoned all pretense of argument, and

⁷¹ *Representative*, September 28, 1898.

⁷² *Minnesota historical collections*, 13:340.

⁷³ Clipping from *Lincoln Journal* (Nebraska), January 8, 1891, in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 8.

⁷⁴ *Pioneer Press*, December 3, 1890.

⁷⁵ Donnelly's oratory paid him well. Writing to Weller of Iowa, July 6, 1891, he stated that he received \$100 and expenses for lectures on literary subjects, but he added: “I do not like to charge for political speeches, for they are with me a ‘labor of love.’” Weller papers.

⁷⁶ Clipping dated November 14, 1888, in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 8.

merely told over again the stories which the preceding speaker had bungled. Needless to say, he brought down the house. His wit was quick as a flash. Once when bombarded with cabages during a speech he shouted: "Gentlemen, lend me your ears—I don't want your heads." Just after his defeat for governor in 1892 he addressed a St. Paul audience which had been very impatient for him to take the platform. "Judging from this enthusiastic reception," he began, "I would appear to be the most popular man in the state of Minnesota — " "You are, you are," yelled the crowd; and Mr. Donnelly added, "between elections."⁷⁷ He delighted in replying to hecklers, and unless blinded by sudden anger he seldom failed to confuse them. "When you retort to your enemies with a smile on your face," he was told by one of his friends, "in your jovial, half-sarcastic way . . . you have a wonderfully strong and drawing power on your hearers which brings them to your side in droves, and utterly disarms your enemies . . . when you allow yourself to get angry and a cloud gathers on your brow like the cloud around Vesuvius on the last day of Pompeii . . . it frightens people from you."⁷⁸

But it was the fighting instinct which, after all, was Donnelly's most outstanding characteristic. He fairly gloried in combat, and neglected few opportunities to place himself in the thick of the fray. More than this, to use his own rather inelegant phrase, he always chose to espouse "the cause of the so-called under dog in the fight."⁷⁹ He loved not merely to fight, but to fight against odds. His political career is the story of one contest after another. He became a republican to fight slavery; he became an antimonopolist to fight the railways and their allies; he became a greenbacker to fight what he called the "money power"; he became a populist to fight the "plutocracy" in whatever form it raised its head. The underlying motive of his literary labor is this same undying spirit of pugnacity. He fought traditional views in his *Atlantis*, his *Ragnarok*, his *Cryptogram*, his *Cæsar's column*, and all the rest. His passion for

⁷⁷ Pegler, "Stories of Ignatius Donnelly," in the *Minneapolis Tribune*, January 6, 1901.

⁷⁸ C. P. Carpenter to Donnelly, December 19, 1890, Donnelly papers.

⁷⁹ Clipping from the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March, 1894, in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 16.

battle entered even into his personal relationships. He was repeatedly embroiled with his creditors; he gained endless notoriety by a great libel suit which he brought in 1891 against the leading newspaper in St. Paul;⁸⁰ he rejected the tenets of the Roman Catholic church to which he was bound by every natural tie, only to accept in his declining years the vagaries of spiritualism; and he defied public opinion by wedding, when he was nearly sixty-six years of age, a young woman of twenty-one. Said a contemporary critic, "Men like Donnelly have a constitutional aversion for anything which is established or has public sanction. Donnelly is opposed to existing parties for the same reason that he attacks Shakespeare. It is his nature to insist on combating the majority. His career proves him the prince of cranks, ready at all times to draw a lance in behalf of any new cause, provided only that it be contrary to good judgment and universal policy." ⁸¹

While these facts of themselves largely account for the failure of so good a warrior to win victories, certain other of his handicaps also deserve mention. His painful anxiety to achieve political preferment alienated many, who for this reason doubted his sincerity. He was not a good judge of men, and seldom chose his lieutenants wisely. He was enormously susceptible to flattery, and easily deceived by those who stooped to use such a weapon. But he was also so exceedingly vain of his own opinions that he could seldom be persuaded to modify them even on the advice of his best friends. Convinced by frequent and bitter experience that no one was to be trusted, he withdrew his confidence from those who could have helped him most, and often made enemies of men who had been his warmest supporters. Once deserted by a satellite, he sought vengeance with unbecoming zeal. Moreover, he loved the unsavory notoriety which his startling deeds and thoughts induced, and he seemed fairly to rack his brain in search of new material for sensations.

No better example of what Theodore Roosevelt called the "lunacy fringe" of reformers is to be found in all American

⁸⁰ In 1891 Donnelly sued the *Pioneer Press* for \$100,000 for the republication of a slanderous letter written about him by William S. King, a political enemy. He was awarded one dollar. The history of the case is set forth in the *Pioneer Press*, October 21, 1891; *St. Paul Globe*, October 24, 25, 1891.

⁸¹ Clipping dated May 31, 1891, in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 8.

history. Donnelly was not insincere; he was in earnest, but he lacked a "balance-wheel." Had he possessed such a mechanism, however, he might have been a relatively inconspicuous and ordinary citizen. It was his affinity for the novel or unique, his willingness to accept fantastic theories and to espouse untried reforms, that made him the man he was. He, and others of his kind, are entitled to a place in history. Out of the visions which they see, the dreams which they dream, grow the realities of to-morrow. Many of their ideas are cast aside, but many of them, too, are taken up and made effective. Men have almost forgotten that once it was only the "lunacy fringe" which advocated the abolition of slavery, the regulation of railway rates, the control of the "trusts," the rights of labor, the election of United States senators by direct vote of the people, equal suffrage for men and women, and the prohibition of the liquor traffic. As a nineteenth century reformer it fell to the lot of Donnelly to advocate, along with other notions more fantastic, just such reforms as these. Judged by contemporary standards he falls far short of being a radical at all. He held to the traditional veneration of the constitution of the United States, he ever denied that he was even a socialist, and he denounced in fervid oratory every suggestion of violence among his followers. He believed that the machinery of government need not be overturned; that by the addition of certain reforms it could be made to defend the rights of the masses as well as it now defended the rights of the classes. His final appeal was always to the ballot-box.⁸²

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⁸² "The Constitution of the United States is but the sermon on the mount crystalized into law," he said. Clipping from the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March, 1894, in Donnelly scrapbooks, volume 16. He described socialism as "a proposition to reform temporary abuses by universal ruin." *Representative*, May 31, 1900. "We do not believe that the path of reform is through the torch and the rifle. We believe it is through the ballot-box." *Ibid.*, July 18, 1894.